

PETROVKA

By

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INCOLN WILLIAMS (PUBLISHERS) LTD.

33 PATERNOSTER ROW
LONDON, E.C.4

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TO THE IMPERISHABLE MEMORY OF
FRANZ LISZT

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CHAPTER I

A FOX IN A HEN-ROOST

"BUT, Marie, I don't know what your aunts will say, if they hear that you're going on the music-halls!" The speaker was a gentle-voiced woman, prematurely white-haired, dressed in rather shabby black silk.

"Does it really matter what they *do* say, mother darling? They've never helped us in any way, though, since father died they've often talked of doing so. But they seem to think they've the right to boss me and find fault with me. Whatever I do, or don't do, for the matter of that, is wrong in their eyes, so why worry any more about them?"

"But, Marie dear, you must make allowance for them," protested Mrs. Drayton querulously. "When I ran away to marry your father who, as you know, had been giving me piano lessons in my London finishing school, they considered that I was a disgrace to the family."

Marie shrugged her shoulders.

"Now I'm a widow they want to be kind to you and me. In their own way, too, they're proud of your talent, and enjoyed your songs at the Countess's charity concert last week, but they'd never agree to your appearing professionally on any stage and you know, my dear, I won't quarrel with them again, for they're wealthy and might help us, and really we're rather badly off."

"Badly off!" repeated her daughter scornfully. "Why not call a spade a spade, motherling, and say we're damnably poor?"

"Marie, how can you use such words? I'm sure you've very well learnt them from me or from your aunts. Also, when you lunch with your aunts in Regent's Park, don't

talk about your life as a music student in Grafburg. They'll never understand your love of art and of foreigners, for they've a contempt, born of fear, for everything that's not British."

"Right-ho, motherling! I'll try to behave like a bread-and-butter miss when I go to their horrible lunch," replied Marie, a wisp of a girl who, with the help of her masters at Grafburg *Conservatorium*, had evolved a form of entertainment consisting of folk-songs and peasant dances, in costume, the success of which depended, not on their intrinsic merit, but her own winsome personality. "In return, motherling, I want you so much to be nice to Mr. Longford when he calls to-day. He says my *chansons dansantes* are good enough for him to get me a booking on some circuit halls. If I do get such a job, I'll make such a lot of money that we needn't bother about my unsympathetic old aunts in their expensively dowdy clothes."

"Marie, you mustn't talk like that, you really mustn't."

"I've never once seen them without their making sneering remarks about father that made my blood boil," the girl continued, heedless of her mother's admonitions, "and they keep on saying that I ought to put up my hair. I've tried to explain to them that I'm supposed to be a child prodigy, and that it's essential for my work that I should look much younger than I really am." Marie's indignation and eloquence increased as they chased each other in vicious circles. "They simply can't or won't realize it, and keep on harping on the unsuitability of a girl of eighteen wearing pigtails till, if I didn't love you so much, I'd flick my poor despised plaits in their stupid suet-pudding faces."

Marie stroked her hair lovingly after this outburst and Mrs. Drayton wisely made no reply. In these wilful moods, Marie showed that she had inherited her father's Irish temperament that had both fascinated and cowed her mother. In the inmost recesses of her brain, Mrs.

Drayton acknowledged that Marie was perfectly justified in rebellion. The girl had been trained as a performer. To forbid her to accept the only class of engagements for which she was fitted was grossly unjust, particularly as Marie was consumed by desire to contribute financially to their meagre income. Mrs. Drayton knew enough about music to realize that Marie would never be a great singer, and that her only chance was as a variety artiste, although the girl's first ambition had been to appear in grand opera, like Wagner's niece, Johanna, at the age of sixteen. Yet since her return to England, in June 1898, three months before this story opens, after an absence of twenty years, Mrs. Drayton had rapidly reverted to the prosperous super-respectable class from which she had sprung and hoped that her sisters would adopt her daughter.

Had he lived in the eighteenth century, when wealthy aristocrats prided themselves on their patronage of musicians, or in the twentieth century, when audiences welcome novelties, Paul Drayton, an Irish composer of supreme talent, might have become world-famous. Thwarted ambition had undermined Drayton's health and, at the age of sixty, he died after a lingering illness, despite the devoted nursing of his daughter and the dutiful care of his wife.

Owing to the persecution of his wife's family, who treated Drayton as a criminal, the musician, soon after his marriage, moved to Grafburg, where he had received his early musical training, and in this German music centre, Marie, his only child, had been born and bred. After he discovered the inadequate mental companionship of his wife, Drayton concentrated his affection on his daughter, and from her babyhood Marie had been taught to appreciate the fine arts in general, and music and dancing in particular. For all his musical neologisms, Drayton regarded Liszt, with whom he had studied, as his hero, and taught his daughter to love Liszt's *Symphonic Poems* and *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

In her youth, Mrs. Drayton had been a doll-like, pink-cheeked, chocolate-box beauty, adored by her father, a wealthy banker. Soon after she had violated the family dogmas of smug propriety, her father, then a widower, who had hankered for a wealthy and, if possible, a titled son-in-law, had succumbed to an attack of choleric apoplexy. His three unmarried daughters felt that they owed a debt of gratitude to their rebellious sister for being the cause of their ill-tempered sire's demise. Paul, their despised brother-in-law being dead, the spinsters were willing to assist Mrs. Drayton and Marie, provided they showed due gratitude for benefits condescendingly conferred. The sisters suggested that mother and daughter should come to England in order that the aunts might decide whether Marie, whom they had never seen, was a fit and proper person to be their companion-secretary. Marie had begged hard to be left in Grafburg, where her father's name alone would have enabled her to obtain employment, but Mrs. Drayton, who after many years of exile had a longing for her kith and kin, insisted upon Marie accompanying her to London.

Marie's schooling had been spasmodic and always secondary to her musical training. For languages, however, she had a gift, and had assimilated German, French, and Italian without any particular effort. Drayton, living in a dream world of his own, had regarded the child as one of the few persons entitled by her talent to enter his private intellectual domain. By the time his daughter knew it, this domain was free from physical passion, for as Drayton's health failed, he detached love from lust, and taught Marie that the yearning of man for woman is the truest source of inspiration.

Strange to say, for one of her temperament, up to the time she reached England after her father's death, although she was in her nineteenth year, Marie was not particularly interested in sex matters. She took it as a matter of course that she would have love affairs all

musicians did, and recognized that a *grande passion* would be necessary for her art to mature. So long as her father lived, however, her admiration for his genius, her desire to interpret his works, and to assist him as copyist and secretary, had left her neither time nor inclination to think about mating. Marie had matured physically later than mentally, consequently, when she accompanied her mother to London, the girl's heart, hitherto totally unstirred, was ready to burst into fierce, consuming flame at the first spark of passion. Mrs. Drayton knew that Marie had heard her father talk tolerantly of Liszt's liaisons and children born out of wedlock, but with an inborn horror of prurience, Mrs. Drayton had been unable to bring herself to discuss sex with her child. Like many another Victorian mother she had assumed, slipshod fashion, that the Creator had set up special machinery to protect her daughter from the temptations of the flesh.

Mrs. Drayton intended to yield to Marie's wish to be allowed to go on the stage, but she delighted to display fictitious authority, and believed that by acceding unwillingly, and grumblingly, she was proving her strength of will.

When Ralph Longford arrived and broached the subject of Marie's music-hall engagements, he found Marie's mother, when carefully handled, as malleable as wax. From an uncle, Longford, who was forty years of age, had inherited a considerable fortune, in addition to a controlling interest in the *Star Music-halls*, and in a journal devoted to social and theatrical news. Longford had been peculiarly attracted by Marie when he had heard her perform at a London charity concert which he had attended, much against his will, because, being a tuft-hunter, he was anxious to make the acquaintance of the dowager countess, the organizer. Dressed in an old-rose, childish frock, that enhanced the warm tints of her ivory skin, her jet black pigtails and her dark

eyes, Marie Drayton, when she appeared on the platform, stirred Longford from his boredom. His interest increased when he read her name on the programme. He remembered that Esmée Lane, the poster artist, had told him about the little Drayton girl whom she had known in Grafburg and, woman epicure that he was, he determined immediately to make Marie's acquaintance. After her second turn, he made his way to the artistes' room and introduced himself to Marie, on the plea that he wished to publish in his newspaper notes about her late father's work as well as about her own. A few days later, he invited her to accompany him to another concert, organized by the Countess of Coxtori, and Marie soon came to regard him as an influential and very charming friend. She had been overjoyed at Longford's suggestion that she should work on the music-halls, and had begged him to visit her mother and overcome Mrs. Drayton's deep-rooted objection to the stage. Hence Longford's journey on that particular September afternoon to West Kensington, where the Draytons lived in a furnished come-down-in-the-world maisonnette.

Ralph Longford, who looked particularly distinguished and well-groomed against the shabby-genteel background of bamboo cupboards and faded wall-paper, radiated an atmosphere of aristocratic well-being that captivated alike mother and daughter. An adept in the art of obtaining his own way by diplomacy rather than by force, Longford opened the conversation by praising the compositions of the late Paul Drayton, which he claimed to have heard performed in various Continental capitals, whither his work as journalist had taken him.

"Now I want to boast that I've discovered Paul Drayton's daughter," Longford said confidentially, in his caressing voice, valiantly maintaining his place on a dingy sofa, a broken spring of which caused him extreme discomfort. "I was as charmed by her items as my dear

old friend, the Countess of Coxton, predicted, and I feel she ought to be given the chance to make a name for herself while she is still almost a baby." Longford guessed that Marie was older than her pigtailed and short frocks implied, but, at the moment, it suited his purpose to treat her as a child.

Immensely impressed by Longford's feigned intimacy with the aristocracy, Mrs. Drayton smirked an affable reply.

Taking this as a good omen, Longford proceeded, "I've a friend, a Mr. Hobbs, a leading theatrical and musical agent, to whom I'll introduce your daughter, if you'll permit me. On my recommendation, I feel sure that he'll offer her an engagement."

"But it'll be in a music-hall, won't it?" queried Mrs. Drayton.

"Ah, my dear lady, forgive me if I answer your question by another. Have you ever been in a music-hall?"

"Never. When I was last in England, no lady," Mrs. Drayton emphasized the word "lady," "ever went to such places."

"Just so, but things have altered a great deal since then. I've a number of friends, society women, some of them, on the halls, and, as a matter of fact, I obtained engagements for several through Mr. Hobbs. Your daughter too would be able to live at your home under your care, for Hobbs only books for halls in and around London." Longford turned to Marie, "What do you say, my dear? Would you like to work on the variety stage?"

"Mother knows I want a job," said Marie definitely. "I must get something to do at once to earn money. I'm sick of performing at charity shows without pay, as I've been doing ever since we reached London."

"Marie, how can you talk like that?" expostulated Mrs. Drayton. "I'm sure I've no wish for my daughter to sell her talents," she remarked to Longford, slowly and impressively.

"Quite so. I understand your feeling perfectly," replied Ralph soothingly, "but in these hard times we're none of us so well off that a few extra pounds a week are not acceptable. I've no hesitation in saying your daughter'll soon be earning a big salary, if Hobbs is as satisfied with her work as I am. I feel sure that you're far too devoted a mother to stand in Miss Drayton's light. Talent will out, you know, and I'm afraid that if you won't allow a highly reputable agent like Hobbs to obtain engagements for her, she may get into the clutches of some unscrupulous rogue."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Drayton, all her objections melting before Ralph's persuasiveness as snow before the sun, "I suppose I must agree, although I'm far from certain that I'm doing the right thing."

"It's splendid of you to put your daughter's welfare before your own prejudices," Ralph exclaimed cordially. "I promise you that Hobbs'll look after Miss Drayton as though she were his own child, and, in a few months she'll be a star drawing a large salary."

The remainder of his visit Longford devoted to subtle flattery of Mrs. Drayton, who was delighted with the manner in which he courted her opinion on music, art, travel, and books. He was loud in his praises of the autographed photographs presented to Paul Drayton by many musical celebrities, and won Marie's heart by his admiration of the signed portrait of Franz List, her father's greatest treasure, which bore the inscription, in German :

"To Paul Drayton, dear friend and gifted pupil.
FRANZ LISZT, Rome."

Before he left, Longford arranged to communicate with Marie in a few days about an interview with Hobbs, and Mrs. Drayton begged him to revisit her at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER II

THE BLUE ROOM

MORE than a week elapsed before Marie received any communication about the audition with Hobbs, and she began to fear that Longford had forgotten her. Then, one day, when she had decided to make peace with her aunts, she received a letter from Longford asking her to attend an audition at which he would be present. At once, Marie banished all thought of submission to her relatives, and rushed to the piano, for Longford also sent her two songs with the request that she would perform these at the test.

Marie was unaware that Longford was managing director of the *Star Music-halls* and that Hobbs, being booking manager for these halls, was Ralph's employé. Longford had informed Hobbs that Marie Drayton was to be offered an engagement, irrespective of the booking manager's opinion of her merits as an artiste. This order had aroused the interest of Hobbs in Marie Drayton, for he felt sure that unless the girl's charms were considerable, Longford would not have been captivated by her.

When Marie could not find the house number that Longford had given her, she inquired timidly of a gorgeously liveried hall porter at the main entrance of *St. Martin's Star* and, to her surprise, was directed to the stage-door. Marie gave in her name to the doorkeeper, together with a letter addressed to Hobbs that Longford had sent her that very morning, and was shown into a waiting-room, already filled with women, some young, pretty, hopeful, smart—others despondent, middle-aged, faded—for a general audition was in progress. The air

was heavy with the noisome blend of stale perspiration and cheap scent, and Marie was surprised to find that several of the occupants were cockney to the *n*th degree.

"If that dirty dog 'Obbs doesn't see me to-dye I'm never comin' 'ere agine. I'm bloomin' sick of 'im and 'is ordishuns," said a buxom wench, whose golden hair showed black at the roots.

"'Old yer nise, Liz," was the reply of an older woman. "You know yer turn went down well at Battersea at the trial show, and Noocastle, 'Obbs's friend, leastwise 'e said 'e was 'Obbs's friend, advised you to try for the *Star 'Alls*."

"I don't b'lieve 'Obbs will 'ear any girl who 'asn't a man in the *Star Syndicate*," remarked a gawky, red-haired lass, in a stage whisper.

There was much sniggering at this sally and in her corner Marie listened intently. She felt she had entered a new and repugnant world of which, hitherto, she had no conception. "Beggars like me can't be choosers," she said to herself philosophically, "but, thank God that mother isn't here, or all Mr. Longford's persuasiveness'd have been useless. She'd have been so shocked that she wouldn't have let me wait for my interview."

Marie's train of thought was interrupted by a call-boy, who thrust his head round the door, as though it were too much trouble for him to enter the room, proclaiming in the penetrating intonation peculiar to call-boys, "Miss Dryton!"

"What did I sye?" remarked the last speaker significantly as Marie answered the summons, and there was another titter amongst the disgruntled candidates who had not been privileged to enter the sanctuary of the important Mr. Hobbs.

Hobbs was a burly, clean-shaven man of forty-five, with a large, sensual mouth surmounting a square chin. He was baggy and crow's-footed about his steel-grey eyes, set too close together. The day was warm for

late September and as his office was stuffy he was working in his shirt sleeves. At the moment when Marie entered, he was giving an assistant a piece of his mind in language punctuated with "bloody" and "damn," such as Marie had never before heard. Her appearance neither interrupted his flow of invective, nor caused him to apologize for his dishabille, and she stood in the doorway, wondering what to do.

"Come in and shut the door, for Christ's sake; you'll have all these damned papers on the floor," Hobbs remarked fiercely, without deigning to look at the newcomer, as one or two documents blew off the table.

Marie did as commanded. To repair the havoc she picked up the papers and handed them to Hobbs. "I'm so sorry they blew away," she remarked.

The musical intonation of Marie's voice attracted Hobbs, who leered at her lustfully when he observed that she was young and pretty, although her clothes were shabby. With a final admonition to his publicity clerk, not to be a bloody fool, but to get those programme slips ready by five o'clock, he dismissed the delinquent and said to Marie, in what he considered an ingratiating tone, "Well, my dear, and what's your turn? Plenty o' leg, I hope; that's what folks want and I don't blame 'em."

Marie squirmed inwardly at Hobbs's manner. She was amazed that Longford should have such a cad for a friend. Her longing to help her mother, however, conquered her other desire which was to bolt from Hobbs's presence.

Intuition told Marie that, in his mind's eye, Hobbs was undressing her, and she flushed scarlet when he remarked with a knowing wink, "I'm inclined to think you'll do, my dear. The dressing-room's on the right, and the stage is through that far door. Go on as soon as you're ready."

Having shed her outdoor things and adjusted her

dancing sandals, Marie crept silently into the theatre, fearful that Hobbs might waylay her. Marie's was the last trial turn that day and, in consequence, several ballet girls, who were to rehearse after she had finished, were hanging about in their practice knickers. She scanned their faces anxiously, hoping to meet with some response—some smile or kindly word—for she felt desperately lonely, but in vain. She fancied that all the members of the group despised her because, while they were already working at the *Star*, she was only on approval. There was a grand piano on the stage, but Marie could not see anyone who looked like an accompanist. This increased her discomfiture, for she was afraid that Hobbs might enter and, if she kept him waiting, fly into another such rage as she had already witnessed.

Suddenly a deep voice, well-bred and friendly, addressed Marie. "Are you looking for anyone? If so, perhaps I can help you."

Turning to express her thanks, Marie found herself face to face with a man about six feet in height, whose perfectly-formed limbs were covered with a bronze-hued preparation, giving the impression that they were moulded in metal. He wore skin-tight breeches of the same dark colour, his neck, chest, and arms were covered with finely-wrought chains, while his fingers and bare toes glittered with rings. "Allow me to introduce myself," said this strange apparition, "I'm Siva Nataraja, the Hindu Lord of the Dance, and in private life, Donald Fancourt. Do you want the accompanist? You seem to have a lot of music with you."

Marie explained that she required the missing accompanist very urgently as she was afraid of keeping Hobbs waiting.

"It'd do him good if he had to wait," retorted Fancourt, "he thinks he's Lord God Almighty himself where the *Star's* concerned."

Marie laughed. "It might do him good, but it'd do me harm, I'm certain of that," she said, "and I can't afford to rub him up the wrong way."

"Parkes!" shouted Donald, putting up his hand to his mouth and tilting back his head.

Looking up, Marie saw two or three men in an overhead gallery in the wings, arranging lights.

"It's jolly decent of you, Parkes, to see that my lighting's going to be all right for my dress rehearsal, but, at the moment, you're needed down here."

"Right ho," was the answer, and a few seconds later a very æsthetic-looking young man in a velvet coat, with a mop of fair hair, swung himself down an iron ladder leading on to the stage.

Encouraged by the presence of Longford, who had joined Hobbs in the stalls, Marie sang the new songs, one of which was called *The Moon Girl*, with verve.

"Well, my dear," said Hobbs later, in his office, "come up to-morrow at eleven for rehearsal, and I'll get Smith, our producer, on to you. If you work hard I may be able to include you in the programme of the *Tottenham Star* on Monday week. It's one of our smaller halls and a good one at which to gain experience. Later, if your turns do well there, I'll see if I can give you two halls a night. That'd mean more pay, of course."

"Excuse me asking," said Marie timidly, "but how much will I start with?"

"Our usual rate," replied Hobbs, in accordance with Longford's previous instructions, "five pounds a week for six night shows and two matinées. Pay starts on the day you open at Tottenham."

"I'm awfully grateful," said Marie, "and I'll do my best to give satisfaction."

"Just one more thing, Hobbs," said Longford, who had previously taken no part in the conversation, "what

about Miss Drayton's costumes? Perhaps you could give her a hint or two."

The booking manager looked perplexed. Longford had not prepared him for this question, and he had no notion as to the reply that was expected of him. "I really don't know," he said, "our artistes usually have their own dresses ready to suit their turns, but as Miss Drayton's starting with new numbers——" Hobbs paused, uncertain how to proceed.

"May I make a suggestion?" Longford turned to Marie. "I must explain that theatrical costume has always been a hobby of mine, and you should really decide quickly so as to have the dresses ready by Monday week."

"I'd be ever so grateful if you would," the girl answered.

"Well, for the old-world songs you should wear—so I think, anyway—a quaint get-up, a sort of early-Victorian kit." Leading up to the climax Longford had painstakingly planned, he added, "For your *Moon Girl* song, I think you should have a dress of silver tissue, sandals to match, and a silver veil to use in your dance. By the way," Longford abruptly turned to Hobbs, "Miss Drayton must have a stage name. What about Selina, which is Greek for moon?"

"I don't think we've ever had a Selina before," said Hobbs reflectively, "so that'd be all right I should say, but I'll look up records."

"But," said Marie, fearing to shatter the dream castles she had been building, "I hate to talk about money, but I don't see how I can afford expensive clothes just now. You see, mother and I are very poor, for all our savings went to pay the bill of father's last illness and his funeral."

"My dear child, don't upset yourself, please," said Longford consolingly, "I've collected a number of odd lengths of embroideries. Most of them I got when

travelling out East, and they're no good to me now, for I intended them for the girl to whom I was engaged, and who died while I was abroad." While talking of this fictitious fiancée, Longford achieved a dismal expression that was a masterpiece. "If there are any pieces that'd be of use to you, my dear, you're welcome to them."

Marie was greatly touched by Longford's apparent unhappiness, and there was a tender intonation in her voice as she accepted his offer, provided that he could really spare one or two lengths.

"Of course I can," he replied decisively. "They're no earthly good to me now. You might have come over to-day to see them, to save time, but I don't know whether you'll object to coming alone to my flat. I only wish I'd thought of it sooner, I'd have asked your mother to accompany you."

Marie tried to speak.

Longford, however, continued, "I'd suggest your coming another day, but I've to go out of town to-morrow, and I don't know when I'll return. Possibly not in time for your dresses to be ready by Monday week."

Marie hesitated. Then she decided to seize this unique opportunity of procuring suitable costumes.

A few minutes later, with Longford beside her, Marie was sitting in his private hansom, revelling in the unaccustomed luxury. The interview with Hobbs had fatigued her, and she nestled back in the cushions, wishing the drive to go on for ever. She closed her eyes, unaware that Longford was watching her intently. He ached to slip his arm about her, to feel her young body pressed against his own, to taste the sweetness of her lips, but he restrained himself.

On arrival at his flat, Longford told his coachman to take the hansom to the stables as he would not require it again that day. He then opened the door with a

latchkey, and Marie found herself in a small, oak-furnished ante-room, whence her host led her into a large study-lounge, the walls of which were lined with bookshelves. A cheerful fire burnt on the hearth and the luxurious atmosphere of the place satisfied that craving for beautiful surroundings which made the West Kensington maisonnette, with its gimcrack furniture, a source of mental blight to Marie.

Longford smiled at her expressions of delight. "You'd better take off your hat and coat before you sit down." As he spoke he led Marie into the most comfortable bedroom with private bathroom that she had ever seen. "You'll find me in the lounge, when you're ready," said Ralph, and Marie was alone.

The colour scheme of the room was blue, the curtains and carpet were of a warm, deep shade, and Marie longed for time in which to admire the ornamental trappings, that wealth alone can provide, to make attractive the daily routine of dressing and undressing. She dared not linger and, on returning to the lounge, found that tea had been arranged near the fire, while the curtains had been drawn across the windows.

Longford, who had changed into a velvet smoking jacket, was engaged in taking some glasses and a bottle from a beautifully carved cabinet. "Now, my child, come and sit down, and make yourself at home," he said. "You must be exhausted after your hard work, and I'm going to prescribe a glass of champagne. It'll do you far more good than tea, and there are some sandwiches which I hope you'll like."

"Oh, but I never take alcohol. Since father got ill, mother and I've never been able to afford it, and I'm afraid it'll go to my head."

"Rubbish, of course it won't. I'm dead beat, just like you are, and it'd be selfish of you to refuse, for I won't drink alone, while my guest sits and watches me reprovingly. Fizz'll do us both good."

"Well, if you put it that way, I suppose I must say yes," conceded Marie, fearful of annoying her host.

Longford produced a corkscrew and filled two Venetian goblets, the while he indulged in chat about music and travel such as had captivated Mrs. Drayton. Marie became so interested in the conversation that she was quite unconscious of the amount of champagne Longford encouraged her to consume, by skilfully interrupting his anecdotes to drink to the memory of the musicians he discussed. She felt no ill effects, only an exhilaration supplanted her former lassitude.

Marie now guessed that Longford was Hobbs's master, and her misgivings about Hobbs's vulgarity were dispersed when Ralph apologized for his business manager's lack of breeding.

"I hope Hobbs didn't do or say anything outrageous before I came."

"He frightened me a bit, but I suppose I was just silly and old-fashioned."

"You must make allowance for Hobbs," said Ralph tolerantly. "You see, he's not a gentleman, but he's a damned good sort. You may be sure he'll guard your interests."

"Thank you ever so much for introducing me. I do hope you won't think me ungrateful for speaking my mind about Mr. Hobbs."

"Not at all. I'm delighted you talk with perfect freedom."

Longford then suggested that they should go into the bedroom to examine the materials which were to be utilized for Marie's costumes. Marie agreed. She had almost forgotten her reason for visiting Longford's flat. The wine was beginning to have an effect and as she rose, she staggered. In an instant, Longford had caught her in his arms.

"Darling," he whispered, "do you know, child, that you're very lovely?"

"Am I?" said Marie faintly, "but you must have many girl friends better-looking and more charming than I."

"There's no one else quite so dear as you are," came the reply.

Longford lifted Marie and held her at arms' length as though she were a baby. After gazing at her admiringly, he crushed Marie to his heart, pressing his lips on hers in a lingering love kiss. She gave a little cry and Ralph leading her gently to a divan, asked if she felt ill.

"No, only I'm so happy. I'm afraid too that it's getting late and that I ought to be going home."

"Write a hurried note to your mother," Longford commanded. "Tell her that you're detained by business and can't be back from the theatre to which you've been obliged to go for an interview, till about midnight. I'll send the letter by my man and tell him not to wait for an answer."

When he returned from dispatching Marie's letter, Longford led the way into the blue bedroom. He drew the curtains, lighted the gas-stove, removed Marie's hat and coat from the bed, and drew from the wardrobe a roll of silver brocade. "There are six yards here," he said, "that's the usual length for a Hindu lady's drapery. It should be ample for a frock, for you're not very big."

"But what gorgeous stuff it is," said Marie fingering it reverently, "it's far too good for me and I'll be terribly afraid of spoiling it."

"You needn't worry about that," replied Longford. "When it's worn-out I'll give you another."

"How marvellous," said Marie dreamily, "but it's terribly expensive I'm sure. I don't feel that I ought to accept it."

"Nonsense, child. Here's a length for your old-world frock also. Being yellow, it'll be a contrast to your silver moon frock. I'll put these two pictures in

the parcel and they'll be a guide to the dressmaker. By the way, don't let me forget to give you the name of the woman who makes for a lot of my stage friends. Don't worry about the bills. I'll settle them."

"But I must pay you back."

"There's no necessity. Anyway, we needn't discuss that point until you've so much money that you don't know what to do with it."

"How can I ever thank you enough?"

"There's nothing to thank me for. You'd better let me drape the material on you first, though. Then you'll be able to explain things better to the dressmaker. Just take off your frock and we'll be through with the clothes' business in no time."

Marie looked at Longford. He was studying the pictures as though engrossed in the design of the dresses. Reflecting that, probably, he often planned stage costumes and was, therefore, in the habit of seeing girls in their petticoats, she removed her skirt but, in pulling off her bodice, one of its many hooks caught in her hair and she remained a prisoner. She struggled ineffectually to free herself and then burst into nervous laughter as Longford came to the rescue. Tenderly removing the obstreperous garment, he devoured Marie with kisses and, in her slightly intoxicated condition, she made no resistance.

CHAPTER III

THE BROCKEN REVEL

ABOUT eighteen months had elapsed since the day on which Marie first gave herself to Longford with all the rapturous ardour of her freshly awakened nature. Love had ripened Marie. From shy immaturity, she had developed into a woman, whose perfection of body exceeded the beauty of every other mistress Longford had possessed during the course of his varied amours. Her ivory skin had acquired a soft bloom that intensified the seductiveness of her full, creamy neck, and her dark eyes had increased in lustre. As Selina, Marie had learnt to wear scanty stage costumes, and to sing *risqué* songs, with a certain sedate charm and a demure aplomb entirely her own. Yet her work was not outstanding, and Longford knew right well that without his protection she would never have had consecutive bookings at the *Star Halls*.

Six months after Marie had entered upon her music-hall career, Mrs. Drayton died from an illness that had sapped most of Marie's money. As Longford had foreseen, from the day on which she started work, the girl had been compelled to furnish her parent with many luxuries, to justify her choice of a profession over which Mrs. Drayton had always been loud in lamentations. Longford was content to supplement Marie's salary, for he liked to feel that she was in his power. With her body, Marie had given her lover her heart. What Ralph wanted, she wanted ; whatever he suggested, she agreed to with alacrity, and her veneration flattered him.

Shortly after her mother's funeral, Marie had moved

into a dainty little flat in Earl's Court which Longford had rented and furnished for her. Though for herself, Marie would have been content to live humbly on her earnings, she knew that it was essential for her to be as smart and well-groomed as the many other alluring women whom Longford met. Consequently, she spent every penny of her earnings, and of Longford's presents, besides the tiny income which she had inherited from her mother, to make herself attractive in her lover's eyes. She knew she was foolish not to put by for a rainy day, but her desire to appear beautiful in order to hold Longford in thrall outweighed all other considerations. Moreover, because she knew that she could never love any other man with the utter devotion she lavished upon Ralph, she believed in his assurances that no other woman could ever supersede her in his affections. Because of this same devotion, Marie obeyed Ralph's injunctions to keep their liaison secret, although she would have been glad enough to noise abroad her joy in loving and being loved. Not even to Esmée Lane, however, did she confide her precious secret, albeit Esmée was her only woman friend.

On her return from Grafburg, as a struggling young painter, Esmée had fallen in love with the famous bacteriologist, Sir John Porter. She had become his mistress without any qualms, because she knew that her devotion could afford him the comfort which his wife, a confirmed dipsomaniac, could not give. The scientist was more in love with Esmée at the end of their five years' union than in their week-end honeymoon days. Porter had introduced Esmée to Longford, whom he had met originally in Vienna, and sensing the originality of Esmée's designs, Longford had given her regular employment as a poster artist.

Though Esmée was fair-haired, she managed to suit a Chinese background, which normally would have been more appropriate to Marie's black hair and ivory skin.

With Sir John's assistance, Esmée had arranged a home that was unique. Porter had inherited many curios from an ancestor Empire-maker, who had lived long years in Hong-Kong and Shanghai, and visited Siam when that country was almost closed to foreigners. Amongst these treasures was a bronze Buddha from Siam's ancient capital, Ayuthia. In her sober moments Lady Porter detested anything Oriental, and the figure of Buddha, like the great bronze dragons that flanked it, filled her commonplace mind with dread. Moreover, when she was drunk, she was apt to be violent and to smash anything that she disliked. Consequently, for safe-keeping, Sir John had placed his favourite antiques in his mistress's studio, where he could enjoy them in congenial company. The Buddha, in a lacquer shrine, stood at one end of the studio. As in Siam, it was encircled by a brass cobra with hood raised above Buddha's head, to protect the great teacher. In front of the image was a bronze bowl in which Esmée burnt Chinese incense that sent forth an aroma, declared by some of her friends to be refreshing, by others to be aphrodisiacal, by others to be nauseating, and Esmée maintained that she could judge of the temperament of her acquaintances by the effect the incense produced upon them.

The rag, really organized by Sir John to celebrate the fifth anniversary of his unofficial marriage with Esmée, was known to their friends as a *Brocken Revel*, and was to take place on the first Saturday night in May to enable the guests and performers, some of whom were on the stage, to recover from the orgy on Sunday, their rest day. The invitation card, designed by Esmée, bore a portrait of Mephistopheles transporting Faust to the revel in the Harz Mountains, according to Goethe's description. In the left corner appeared *Eleven p.m. to ? a.m.* and, in the right corner, *Fancy Dress or None*.

To satisfy Sir John's very real love of art and his

craving for novelty, Esmée had prevailed upon some of her professional friends to perform, at her revel, songs, dances, sketches, that were debarred from public production because of the delicate nerves of the Lord Chamberlain. Amongst the band of entertainers was Marie, who, persuaded by Longford, had consented to give a *chanson dansante* impersonation of Madame de Pompadour. Longford had promised to escort Marie to the *Brocken Revel*. At the last moment, however, while she was dressing as the Pompadour, before leaving the *St. Martin's Star*, Marie received a pencil note from Ralph asking her to go alone to Esmée's party where he would join her. Longford had taken so much interest in arranging what he called *The Pompadour au Naturel*, that Marie felt convinced he would arrive at the studio in time to give her courage to perform this turn. By the time she reached St. John's Wood, it was past midnight but, as she entered the studio, Marie realized at a glance that her lover was not there. Esmée, attired as Martha, in *Faust*, greeted Marie warmly and begged her to give her item at once, because the stage was set ready, and would have to be reset for succeeding turns. There was no help for it, Marie had to comply or explain the reason of her reluctance, and she chose the former alternative.

Longford had conceived the idea of Marie, as Madame de Pompadour, recounting some of her most intimate thoughts and love-making experiences before dancing for the private delectation of an invisible Louis XV.

On the *Star* stage Marie's dress, despite its excessive décolletage, was a voluminous affair of rich, stand-alone, opaque silk. At Longford's suggestion, in Esmée's studio, this was replaced by a gown of transparent lace, through which Marie's nude limbs were visible. Before commencing to dance, Marie removed her gown and appeared in abbreviated blue satin knickers and brassière, the undressed effect of which was emphasized by the

dignified white wig which she retained. The dance was as subtle a combination of the *cancan* and the *danse du ventre* as Longford could contrive, and was warmly applauded.

"If Selina could only appear like that on the stage, her success'd be a certainty," declared Shrewsbury, the *Daily Post* critic, who had passed judgment on actors and variety artistes for nearly twenty years.

"I agree," said his companion, Coleman, an ahead-of-his-time artist, "if she could only do a naked turn she'd be entrancing."

"It's this damned hypocritical Puritan spirit of England, with its inhibitions; that's what ruins the stage in this country. Let's have a whisky and soda, Coleman, and forget it. Porter's Mull is the smoothest I've drunk for years."

At the termination of her item, Marie slipped a shawl about her and squatted on a divan, anxious not to miss any detail of Fancourt's *Complete Dance of Siva* which, on the stage, had to be curtailed. Fancourt, bronze-hued from head to foot, as on the occasion when Marie first met him, was surrounded by the aureole of flame that represents the hall of the universe in which Siva, as Lord of Creation, through his dance cleanses the soul from sin. Descending from his lotus pedestal, Fancourt began to tread the great dance which, according to Hindu beliefs, maintains the cosmic rhythm. As he moved, the spectators noted that in his hair were the deity's symbols of a cobra, a skull and a mermaid figure, Ganga, representing the Ganges river, which is supposed to have fallen from Heaven and to have lodged in Siva's locks. Squatting on the floor, were Fancourt's two Indian musicians. There was a look of adoration on their faces as they watched the performance which, to them, was not an entertainment but a sacred rite. In Fancourt's interpretation of the sacred dance there were breadth, power, imagination. At first slow and weighty,

Fancourt gradually gathered momentum and commenced a swirl of intricate motion that defied analysis. His raised legs suggested the spokes of a fast whirling wheel. Round and round he spun, with serpentine contortions, as though, like the dervishes, aiming at a clairvoyante condition. Suddenly he came to a standstill. There was dead silence, and the musicians prostrated themselves before him as between his eyebrows there appeared a tiny, red light—the third eye of the god—the eye that extends his vision into the region of the supernatural. Then the stage was darkened, the only illumination proceeding from the aureole of flame and the god's centre eye. When the lights were raised, Fancourt was back on his pedestal surrounded by the ring of fire and wearing the solemn, rapt expression of the ascetic visionary.

At the close, instead of applause, there was a hush, for, momentarily, Fancourt's dance had bridged the gulf separating the East from the West. Even the most frivolous onlooker was awed by the question that presented itself unbidden, "What did the dance mean?" Subconsciously, many members of the audience paid homage to the mysticism of the great, uncomprehended India.

The Siva dance was followed by the revel which gave the name to the entertainment. Lionel Bowen, a good-looking actor, arrayed in Mephistophelean costume, apostrophized, in Goethe's own words, Sir John. Disguised as a witch, the bacteriologist was brewing the potion that was to alter Faust from an old and bloodless savant into a young and gallant lover. Nobody was pedantic enough to criticize Sir John for transferring the magic drink from the *Witches' Kitchen* to the *Walpurgis Night* scene on the Harz Mountains. The witch ladled the potion, strong punch, into large goblets, and as soon as Faust swallowed his draught he cast aside his scholar's gown, slouch hat and beard, and appeared in the multi-

coloured costume of the sixteenth-century dandy. He imparted a lingeringly appreciative kiss on the lips of a golden-locked Marguerite, who responded ardently to his embrace. This was the sign for a vast amount of kissing and caressing; and to encourage men and women to disentangle themselves before any serious complications arose, the band struck up the *Blue Danube*, to which the guests danced with an abandon more suited to the Brocken than to St. John's Wood. There followed more punch, more kissing, more dancing.

As Marie glanced round the room it seemed to her that each girl except herself was in the company of the man she loved best. The only person lonely and heart-sore in that merry crowd was Marie Drayton, for Longford had never arrived. During a lull, she whispered something to Parkes. He nodded assent and seating himself at the piano, struck the opening chords of Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody*. Bending forward, Marie started to improvise steps that expressed all the pathos, all the unstilled yearning for happiness contained in the *Lassan* or slow movement. She felt that Liszt, and Liszt alone, could save her from her grief. Though Marie's dance was unexpected, unrehearsed, it created enthusiasm similar to that aroused by Fancourt's, for it was inspired. After the *Lassan*, without allowing applause to break the continuity, Parkes commenced the *Friska*, and Marie began to foot an intricate measure, letting her body halt, slightly, on the strong beat of each bar. She could no more prevent herself from dancing, than she could prevent herself from adoring Longford, her wonder man. He might treat her badly, be unfaithful, even separate from her—she, on her part might retaliate by taking other lovers, to satisfy her senses or to maintain her body in luxury. Should these things come to pass they would be immaterial and would not affect the great fundamental fact of her life, that Longford was her true mate. In his arms she had

learnt the meaning of life, of love, and in Marie's heart no other man could occupy his niche. As the music hurtled to its climax, Marie's feet moved with greater and ever greater speed. The great chords seemed to generate in her, breath inexhaustible, energy superhuman.

At the close, Shrewsbury took her on one side. "But, my child, why in the name of wonder, have you hidden your light under a bushel up till to-night? Your performance this evening has been a revelation. Hasn't Hobbs seen it? That dance'd make a furore. He ought to book you for it at a high figure."

"It's no good, I'm afraid. You see I only made up the dance as I went along and I don't believe I could repeat it."

"What?"

Afraid that she might betray her consuming ache for Ralph to participate in her triumph, Marie laughed as she added, "It must have been the effect of the punch. Perhaps if Sir John gave me that every night, I could dance every night as I've just done."

The guests began to disperse.

CHAPTER IV

THREE IN A FLAT

LONGFORD had been proud of the change in Marie, and she had taken pride of place in his affections until, some ten months after her removal to Earl's Court, Ralph had met Lorette Dollond, the wealthy American wife of an English nobleman, twenty-five years older than herself. Lady Dollond regarded her spouse as a human crane, by means of which she had been raised to the social heights to which she aspired. Realizing that the said crane could lower as easily as it could lift, Lorette, who loved adulation, and whose sexual cravings her elderly husband could not satisfy, was careful only to deviate from the path of conjugal virtue when Lord Dollond's back was very securely turned. For the first two years of her married life, Lorette's opportunities for infidelities had been very few and far between. At the time she met Longford, however, Dollond, weary of society functions in London, on the Riviera, in Egypt, and wherever else his wife decided to display herself, had accepted an invitation to preside over a commission that was to proceed to East Africa to investigate the vexed question of boundaries. He was sick to death of the rôle of the beautiful Lady Dollond's husband, and hoped that the mission would afford him an opportunity to gratify his love of big game shooting.

It was because of Lorette that Longford had not attended the *Broken Revel*. While preparing to escort Marie, he had received a note from Lady Dollond asking him to meet her at a reception, to fix details about their projected excursion on the morrow. At the function, it was agreed that Lorette would send Ralph

a note early on the following day, as soon as her husband had set out for Hertfordshire, where he was to spend the day in business discussion with his brother. While Dollond was thus occupied, Ralph and Lorette would pass the time together at a quiet country inn in Surrey. In consequence, when Lorette's messenger arrived about ten-thirty on the morning after the *Brocken Revel*, Ralph opened the letter he was expecting with avidity. The message, however, was a disappointment. Lorette stated that her husband had decided to remain in town, for his brother had arrived in London unexpectedly, and that she would have to be present at her husband's business interviews.

As he made his way to his dressing-room, Ralph reflected how best to employ the day that, unknowingly, Lord Dollond had spoilt for him. Variety being as the breath of life to his nostrils, Longford welcomed the change from an impecunious mistress like Marie, who adored him, to a wealthy one, like Lorette, who kept him constantly on the alert by her coquetry. Of Marie, Longford was so certain that he told himself she was becoming as stale as though she were his legal wife. Moreover, all she knew of love-making was thanks to his tuition. His desire for Lorette increased, not only because Lady Dollond had to exercise economy in adultery while she and her husband lived under the same roof, but because Ralph discovered, when he held her in his arms for the first time, that Lorette was an expert in love, that subtlest of arts, of which the bulk of men and women scarce know the alphabet. Having decided that he had no further use for Marie, at the moment, Longford was prompted to rid himself of her, at least temporarily. He wondered whether Marie had saved anything during the months that had elapsed since her mother's death and resolved, at the first opportunity, to ascertain Hobbs's views as to Marie's chances of music-hall employment on her own merits.

Longford could not banish Marie from his thoughts, and decided to devote his attention to the Gordian knot of his love affairs. To this end he sent a letter by his coachman to Hobbs. In this communication, which was more of an order than an invitation, Longford requested Hobbs to lunch with him that day to discuss business. The managing director never considered anyone's convenience but his own, and had no hesitation in asking the booking agent to sacrifice his holiday to work.

When Ralph had furnished Hobbs with a good cigar, as an accompaniment to excellent post-prandial coffee and liqueur brandy, he asked, as though by chance, "Have you decided on Selina's next turn? I believe you said her present contract terminates shortly. It struck me the other night, when I was in front, that her numbers are pretty threadbare. Our audiences are getting bored with her."

"I'm glad you've raised the question," replied Hobbs, "I've been meaning to ask you for some time if, for a change, you really want to put her into that new sketch you spoke about."

"My dear fellow," said Longford cordially, "I want your opinion. Personally I'm averse to staging any new commonplace sketches just now, for I've decided to import from Paris some hot-stuff playlets. Their adaptation won't take long and I want to produce them as soon as they're ready." Longford paused to flick the ash carefully from the end of his cigar. "Couldn't you get Selina a booking in the provinces for a bit?" he continued. "She'd get over her staleness, gain experience, and be generally freshened up if she were to leave the *Star Halls*, and tour for a few months. I don't think she's suited for the playlets I've in mind, and I can't think of any new solos for her."

Hobbs was astonished. He had been fascinated by Marie at their first meeting and for a long time had been

anxious to occupy Longford's place in her life. If Longford had really broken with Marie, Hobbs determined to lose no time in reaping the reward of his patience. He reflected that if Marie remained in London with the *Star Halls*, his plans would be facilitated. He resolved, therefore, without betraying his intentions, to attempt to checkmate Longford's schemes for removing her from the capital.

"Selina's a bit stale, it's true," said Hobbs reflectively, "still her turns are always useful certs to fill gaps, and she never gives trouble, nor minds if she's put at the beginning or end of the programme. She doesn't raise hell, as many of the bitches do, if they aren't starved and given the best places. I'm inclined to think it'd be better to keep her with us, rather than to try and pass her on. That's to say," said Hobbs guardedly, hoping to ascertain Longford's sentiments about Marie, "if you want her to have regular work. Otherwise, of course, I can sack her at the expiry of her present contract."

"We'll talk over the matter again later. I want to finish some other business with you to-day," said Longford, fearful of showing his hand if the discussion about Marie Drayton were prolonged.

Sensing his rival's desire for concealment, Hobbs resolved on a bold stroke, trusting that the results might justify the lies he was about to tell. "I've a brain wave," he remarked, "why not get her to work a turn with Fancourt? They're such pals that she'd probably do well with him, and I'm sure he'd be delighted to have her as his partner."

"What made you think of it?" queried Longford, endeavouring to conceal his interest.

"Why surely you know Fancourt's very sweet on Marie. Has been for a long time. Now her mother's dead, he takes her home most nights after the shows, and has moved to Earl's Court to be near her. He gave me his new address only the other day."

Longford gasped. So he had been too sure of Marie and she had found consolation for his recent neglect. He wondered whether, unobserved by him, she had learnt to assimilate his methods of deception, reservations, and discretion. The remainder of the business he dispatched quickly with Hobbs, who left about 3.30 p.m., hoping that the seeds of suspicion he had sown would soon germinate.

After Hobbs's departure, Longford paced his studio with gait and mien of a panther. That Marie should prefer Fancourt to him—the idea was unthinkable. Yet supposing Marie were unfaithful to him, it would simplify matters considerably. Then he would have no qualms about breaking with her. Ralph decided to go over to Marie's flat immediately. She made a point of remaining at home on Sunday afternoons, when he often visited her. Maybe she might convince him of her innocence, in which event he would persuade her to agree to temporary banishment to the provinces. If, on the other hand, he was not assured of her fidelity, then, all the better for his peace of mind.

While Longford had been busy disentangling the threads of his liaisons and plaiting them into separate skeins, Fancourt had been occupied in similar fashion, although there were no dual objects of Donald's devotion. More than once, Fancourt had proposed to Marie, but she had been firm in her refusal, on the plea that, although she liked him, she did not love him.

During lunch with a friend, who had arrived unexpectedly in London on the Sunday after Esmée's revel, Fancourt had received an offer to go to New York at the termination of his contract with the *Star Syndicate*, and, before accepting, hastened to Marie's studio to try and persuade her to accompany him to America as his wife. Fancourt's father was a successful Calcutta jute merchant, but Donald had devoted himself to Indian music and dancing rather than to business. Eventually,

Fancourt Senior had agreed to Donald taking up a stage career over which the young man was enthusiastic, in place of commerce, in which he did not even pretend to take an interest. Donald, therefore, felt justified in asking Marie to marry him, for the income settled on him by his parent was sufficient to enable him to support a wife, irrespective of his salary on the music-halls. Further, he was sole heir to the Fancourt fortune, unless his father remarried, which seemed improbable.

Marie's reply to Donald's renewed proposal was a repetition of her refusal. She was alarmed at his ardour, and was anxious for him to leave her flat without any attempt at impassioned love-making which, if compelled to do so, she was prepared to resist with the violence of a wild cat.

When Longford opened the entrance door of Marie's flat with his latchkey, he guessed that his mistress was at home, for a light was burning in the hall, and she had no resident servant. He walked silently, as was his wont, to the sitting-room and quietly entered. Fancourt had his back to the door, and as he was bending over Marie, whom he clasped in his arms, she too was unaware of the presence of a third person.

"Marie," Fancourt was saying, "give me one word of hope." He clasped her yet closer as he added, "If you change your mind while I'm away, as please God you will, only cable me, and I'll fix up your passage and arrange for us to be married as soon as you reach New York."

Marie moved in Fancourt's arms, trying to escape from their imprisonment, but Donald, wilfully mistaking her restlessness for response, drew her yet closer, implanting on her mouth a long, impassioned kiss, as though, by this means, he would extract from her lips the consent they failed to frame. At this juncture, Longford involuntarily betrayed his presence by loosening his hold on the door, which creaked. At the

sound, Fancourt released Marie who rushed towards Longford for protection.

"Ralph," she exclaimed, clinging to him, "how glad I am to see you! I'll explain everything."

Longford shook off her fingers brusquely as though her touch contaminated him. Before he could speak, however, Fancourt, livid with rage, hissed, "Now I know that all the stories about you and Longford are true. I'm glad you refused to marry me. I don't want other people's mistresses. I'd have left you alone from the start, if you'd only told me the truth."

To command silence, Longford raised his right hand in which he held the latchkey. Catching sight of it, Fancourt remarked to Longford with a sneer, "I apologize for intruding in what must be your flat as I see you have the latchkey."

As Donald strode towards the door, clumsy in his rage, he knocked over the small table that supported the signed portrait of Liszt, which had once belonged to Paul Drayton. There was a crash, and a sound of broken glass added to the storm. The likeness was on the floor, the oak frame was broken. Marie moaned. To her it seemed that Liszt, her father's idol and her own, lay bleeding before her. Heedless of the damage he had done, Fancourt left the flat, banging the front door behind him.

The mask-like impassivity of Longford's countenance terrified Marie.

"Ralph," Marie implored, "I'm innocent, believe me. I ought to have told you that, for the last two or three months, Fancourt has been begging me to marry him. Of course I've always refused, for I've no love for any man but you. Donald always behaved himself until to-day, so I didn't think it worth while to bother you, nor to spoil our meetings by letting even the thought of another man come between us."

"There's no need for melodrama; you're not on the

stage," said Longford coldly, "also don't shout, or we'll have the neighbours coming to inquire if there's a drunken brawl going on, and I object to being mixed up in such scenes."

To Marie, Ralph's low, cold tones sounded like a death knell. She tried to speak, but sobs choked her.

"Shut up, for goodness sake," Longford continued testily. "Your tears and lies make your infidelity and ingratitude a thousand times worse. You're at liberty to marry Fancourt at once, if he'll have you. I've done with you."

"Ralph," Marie moaned, as she sank on to the divan, "you can't treat me like this. I'm going to have a baby, Ralph, your baby. I wasn't sure until a few days ago, or I'd have told you before. I've willed the baby's to be a genius, one that'll have all your brains, and all the musical talent that I've longed in vain to possess."

"Stop this drivel," Longford retorted, "I don't believe you're going to have a child, it's another lie you've invented to trick me into marrying you. Anyway, if you're *enceinte*, I'm not responsible. I've been too careful for that. Fancourt perhaps hasn't been so cautious. You'd better try to convince him of his paternity." Longford moved to the door and closed it behind him with a gentleness that, to Marie's ears, had far more finality than Fancourt's bang.

A deathlike chill stole over Marie at the thought that the man she loved with every fibre of her body, soul, and spirit, could so easily believe her guilty. Like a whirlpool, the waters of her brain seethed about her troubles. Longford—her unborn child—her unborn child—Longford—she, the fragile craft buffeted from one rock to the other and menaced by annihilation. How long she remained in the position in which Longford left her, she did not know. Life itself had lost all meaning for her. Eventually, cramped, faint, chilled, she struggled

to her feet and stumbled towards the pieces of shattered glass and broken frame. The sight of Liszt's portrait with the magnetic eyes gave Marie a fresh impetus to live.

"Yes, my baby shall be a musician and a genius," she whispered, "even though his father disowns him, and why not? It must inherit the artistic temperament of both its parents and no child was ever begotten in greater ecstasy." A flood of affection for the unborn baby welled into her heart. Her life should be devoted to her child. For it she would suffer, work, fight, and, if her prayers were answered, it should interpret the works of Liszt, her lodestar, as though the spirit of the master had been reincarnated in its being.

CHAPTER V

THE BIRTH OF A STAR

To Marie, the days immediately succeeding the scene with Longford were one prolonged nightmare. It seemed to her that each evening her turns earned less and less applause, although she made heroic efforts to prevent her depression from affecting her work. The worry and uncertainty wore away her courage. When a fortnight had passed and she had not heard from her lover, she sent him a letter. "I want nothing but your love," Marie wrote, "without it, the mainstay of my life has gone. To keep it I am willing to make any sacrifice. Do not blot me out of your existence, that is all I ask. If I have extinguished your affection by my foolish concealment of Fancourt's friendship, for the sake of our unborn child, give me a chance to try and rekindle it."

Ralph burnt the letter on the hearth, on which, on cold days, Marie had been wont to warm her hands before caressing him. In reply, he sent her his cheque for her month's rent, then due, with a curt message that this would be his last remittance.

Longford's communication convinced Marie that her lover would not relent. She fretted about the coming termination of her contract and trusted that it would be renewed, for she reckoned that if her voice did not weaken, she would be able to work for three or four months longer before her condition became apparent. She decided to move into cheap lodgings immediately, for she realized that every penny she could save would be required to cover the cost of her confinement, and to support her child while she was out of work. Hardships for herself she could tolerate, but she was desperately

anxious that her baby should not suffer from privations.

Having sent Marie her cheque, Longford decided to sandwich the renewal of Selina's contract between other business matters which he had to discuss with Hobbs.

"By the way, Hobbs," Ralph remarked casually to the booking manager, "I've been thinking over Selina's engagements, and I'll leave her further employment in your hands. If you think it worth while to offer a renewal, do so by all means, but I can't provide any more items for her to work alone, I'm too infernally busy. Now that Fancourt's leaving for America the question of her doing a sketch with him doesn't arise." While speaking, Longford took up a file of correspondence as though he had dismissed Selina finally from his mind.

"I'll bear in mind what you say," remarked the manager, feigning nonchalance, while he revelled secretly in the thought that Marie's future work at the *Star Halls* would depend upon her acceptance of his terms, instead of those of the managing director.

A day or two later, Marie received from Hobbs a formal notice making an appointment for her to call at his office. Like a drowning person she clutched at this prospect of further employment, for she was finding her attempts to swim against the strong current of adversity very exhausting.

When Marie reached *St. Martin's Star*, a clerk showed her into a small waiting-room communicating with Hobbs's private office. While alone, Marie recalled the manager's behaviour at her first interview and, although Hobbs had made no advance to her while she was under Longford's protection, she dreaded what might be in store if Hobbs knew that Ralph had cast her off.

While Marie was debating upon the attitude that Hobbs would assume, his entrance put an end to her doubts.

"Selina, how ill you look! Come into my office," said Hobbs, holding the door open for Marie to pass.

When she was seated, the booking manager locked

the doors leading from his office into the waiting-room and into the corridor. "You see I look upon you as an important visitor, Selina, and I don't want to be disturbed while you're here. I've several things to discuss with you, my dear, including the renewal of your contract. Will you have a drink for a start to buck you up?"

Marie refused.

"Well, I hope you won't mind if I help myself," Hobbs proceeded, opening a cupboard and pouring himself out a whisky and soda.

Marie's thoughts flew back to the day on which, for the first time, Longford had plied her with champagne, and her discomfiture increased when Hobbs esconced himself beside her. She pushed his hand away and withdrew to the end of the divan. "I think we can discuss my business without caresses," she said gently, but firmly. "You mayn't be aware of it, but I dislike being pawed."

"Oh, indeed," retorted Hobbs with a sneer. "It's no use for you to try the injured innocence stunt on me. I take it you'd no objection to Longford pawing you. Indeed, it seems to have been he who tired of it first. But, never mind, I'll console you."

In an instant Marie rose to her feet. "I didn't come here to be insulted," she remarked angrily.

As the colour mantled in Marie's cheeks, Hobbs thought he had never seen her look so pretty. He liked girls to have spunk, as he called it, and his desire for Marie increased. "Little crosspatch," he pleaded, "don't be so cold. Just be a little kind to me and I'll soon console you and make you forget Longford." He edged up to Marie, thrust his arm round her waist, and forced her to resume her seat. "I'll look after you," the booking manager continued, "you've only to give yourself to me and you shall have all the bookings you need to keep you going."

"But suppose I don't choose to give myself to you?" Marie tried in vain to elude Hobbs's caresses.

"Then you'd be a damned little fool, and you wouldn't get any more work from me. But you're not a damned little fool, but a dear, sweet, sensible, little girl, who likes to be made a fuss of. Only let me see the veil go up and I'll come round to your place with a new contract ready for you to sign. I can put it through in a couple of days, and I'll give you work in our halls on the south side of the river. You won't meet Longford there, for he never goes to the *Lambeth* and *Brixton Stars*. I live over there, Kennington way, and I know of some cosy digs you can get, quite near me."

Before Marie had framed a reply, Hobbs continued, "What about a little bit on account, eh?"

Marie shook her head. Though death for herself and her baby were the alternative, she determined never to yield. She regarded her body as a shrine, to be kept free from all impurities that might defile the child within.

Hobbs's small stock of patience was nearly at an end. However, gourmand, rather than gourmet, though he was, where women were concerned, he resolved to make one more attempt to persuade Marie to respond to his solicitations, for he reflected that she must be uniquely satisfying to have held Longford's itinerant affections in thrall for nearly two years.

"Are you frightened of Longford?" Hobbs queried. "He won't interfere with you, darling, you're free, free as air to belong to me." The thought of possessing Marie drove Hobbs to the verge of madness and there was a break in his voice, as he murmured excitedly, "Sweetheart," and endeavoured to draw her into a recumbent position. His efforts were vain. In the struggle that ensued, Hobbs lost his balance and fell from the divan, his head violently striking the floor.

Marie jumped up, rushed to the window and threw it

open. "Unlock the door," she commanded. "If you don't I'll shout for the police."

Hobbs flung a key at Marie, hoping to hit her, but his hand was shaky and it alighted on a chair beside her.

"Your contract doesn't end for another week," the booking manager hissed, "but I'll send you your pay in lieu of notice. Don't you ever dare to set foot in the *Star Halls* again, or I'll have the police on to you for loitering, you bloody bitch."

Endeavouring to conceal all trace of her emotion, Marie walked into the general office. To her relief, the clerks paid no attention to her as she left the *St. Martin's Star* for the last time.

Some months passed.

One afternoon, in the December succeeding her dismissal from the *Star Halls*, Marie sat alone, brooding in her dismal lodging near Harrow Road. She had renounced all hope of giving birth to her baby in pleasant surroundings. Suddenly she was surprised by a knock at the door and the entrance of Esmée Lane.

"Where have you been, naughty child, hiding yourself like this?" said Marie's visitor, kissing her affectionately. "I've tried so often to discover your whereabouts, but didn't get hold of your address till yesterday."

"This is a horrible place," said Marie, "but I can't afford anything better."

Esmée put her arms round Marie. "Come and sit down and tell me your troubles," she said gently. "Mind you, I don't want to pry into your secrets, but for your sake, and for the sake of your parents, who were so kind to me in Grafburg, I'm determined to help you."

"I've just decided to go into the maternity ward of a general hospital," Marie said laconically. "Poor folk, especially when, like me, they're the world's unwanted, can't be choosers."

"Now listen to me, Marie. I know a girl, or rather a woman about my own age, who's a real good sort.

Her name's Cynthia Brook, and she can help you if anyone can."

The idea of aid, no matter from what quarter, arrested Marie's attention, and she listened eagerly as Esmée continued. "Cynthia's well-educated, comes of good family and her parents are wealthy. She has no need to earn her own living and so, for a hobby has started a home in Bloomsbury for unmarried mothers. I've known Cynthia for years and feel sure she'll do what she can for you." Noticing Marie's interest, Esmée added, "She's saved several from suicide, I believe, but she'll be able to tell you much better than I can about herself and her work, if you'll let me take you over to see her one evening."

"Esmée, dear, of course I'll be only too thankful to meet Cynthia, if you're sure she won't mind me being in this condition."

"Of course, she won't. You've been let down and that's an *Open Sesame* to Cynthia's heart."

Touched by Esmée's sympathy, Marie, under pledge of secrecy, divulged the name of her seducer and gave the true account of her tragic love affair.

Esmée advised Marie never to mention Longford's name to Cynthia. "You see, dear," said the artist, "Cynthia's a thundering good sort, but like most philanthropists, she's a bit of a busybody. She might try to intercede with Longford on your behalf. If Longford denied his paternity to Cynthia her interference'd only do you harm."

Cynthia lived in a side street off Theobald's Road, because the locality was convenient for her self-imposed work.

The pale-faced girl who opened the door to admit Esmée and Marie on the day of their appointment, led the way into a long room, where orange-coloured cushions and china cheered grey walls, hung with Medici prints. As her guests entered, Cynthia advanced to

meet them. She was about thirty-five, slim, frail, and in appearance and manner much less forceful than Marie had anticipated. At once Marie's heart warmed. She felt that in Cynthia Brook she had found a friend.

For Cynthia the call of the flesh had always been subordinate to that of the spirit, and her lack of sensuality had influenced the selection of her life's work. In striking contrast to other women by whom Marie, in the course of her pregnancy, had been interviewed, Cynthia asked the minimum of questions, and, therefore, encouraged confidences instead of repelling them. Marie described briefly her position, but did not mention the name of her child's father.

Cynthia told her visitors a good deal about her work and then, addressing herself directly to Marie, remarked, "I wonder whether you'd be willing to assist me after the birth of your baby, if you've no other job in view. Esmée has told me that you're highly educated and a brilliant musician, and that you've had enough of the stage for the present. If you'd stop here permanently to organize entertainments, speak at public meetings on behalf of my home, and arrange about the sale of the goods manufactured by my girls, I'd be eternally grateful, for I can't attend to everything myself."

"How awfully good of you to offer me a job!" exclaimed Marie. Then, giving ear to the call of motherhood, she continued, "I'd love you to give me a trial provided you'd let me keep my baby with me. I don't want to separate from it."

"You wouldn't need to do that," Cynthia answered, "for I've nurseries here for the kiddies so that they can live with their mothers."

Little further discussion was required to arrange details. In exchange for her and her baby's keep, Marie was to become sales manager and social organizer.

It was with thanksgiving in her heart that Marie left the Bloomsbury mansion looking forward to her return

there the following week. Cynthia's home seemed to the expectant mother the one house in the world where she was regarded neither as a criminal nor an untouchable, but merely as a bruised human being in urgent need of comfort.

CHAPTER VI

OLGA OR TOM?

"MARIE, a man called on you this afternoon. He seemed very disappointed that you were out and asked when you'd be back. I told him it was no good his calling without making an appointment first. So he asked you to write to him on your return. Here's his name and address. He spelt them out so I've got them right I hope."

"Why, it's Tom Rayner," said Marie, reading the slip of paper Cynthia handed her. "I used to know him in Grafburg. I haven't seen or heard of him for years, not since I was a little girl. I believe he got a job in India after he finished his training."

"He said he was on leave," Cynthia remarked.

"I don't think I'll see him though," Marie added after a pause. "I'd have to conceal the existence of Baby Olga. Besides, he'd ask awkward questions, and want to know why I'm not a concert artiste. In Grafburg he knew how keen father was for me to be a really first-class performer, a pianist who'd make a name in the world. I hadn't switched over to singing when Tom left Germany for I was still too young. I'd be ashamed for him to know what a mediocrity I am." Mortified at her own failure to become a musical celebrity, Marie now pinned her hopes upon the future musical triumphs of her sixteen-months-old daughter, Olga.

Cynthia trusted that further disillusion was not in store for her friend, and tried to divert Marie's attention from the past by tackling the present problem, Tom's potential visit to the rescue home. "I'd suggest you ask Mr. Rayner to come here and see you," Cynthia

remarked, "but the house is so full just now that I'm afraid we couldn't guarantee that he wouldn't encounter at least a couple of expectant mothers, and hear a chorus of squalling youngsters. Then he'd most certainly ask awkward questions and you'd have difficulty in explaining your present quarters."

"Bother the man. Why can't he leave me alone? I don't want to interfere with his business, so why must he poke his nose into mine?"

"Come now, Marie. You ought to feel complimented that he remembers you, and it'll do you good to go out with him if he asks you. It's been all work and no play for you since you came here a year and a half ago." Cynthia's matchmaking instinct was on the alert for, like most rescue workers, she possessed a craving to see her girls married. She scented Rayner as a possible fiancé for Marie, and was anxious to run him to earth while the occasion was favourable.

"Well, if I've worked hard, it's because I've enjoyed doing so. I don't get enough time as it is to play with Olga, and if I start going out with Tom I'll have even less," replied Marie. "He is, or was, crazy on music, and he'll expect me to go to concerts and opera with him."

"Well, you'll love that and you know Olga is the pet of the nurses. She'll be as well looked after while you're away with Mr. Rayner as when you're at work."

While Marie was planning a letter of excuse to Rayner, a telegram addressed to her arrived. "It's from Esmée," Marie said, "she insists that I should go to her studio to-night to meet Tom. She knew him too in Grafburg, and it must have been she who gave him my address."

"Go and have a good time," said Cynthia. "Olga shall sleep in my room to-night, so you needn't worry about her."

Tom Rayner, ten years Marie's senior, was an engineer on leave from India. His mother had known Paul

Drayton, for she hailed from the same part of Ireland as the musician, and when Tom, at the age of nineteen, had gone to Grafburg for a specialized course of engineering, she had asked her countryman to keep his eye on her son. Even in those days, Rayner had made a pet of Marie, then a small girl of nine and, in company with Esmée Lane, an art student about his own age, had spent much of his time at the Drayton's flat. During his eighteen months' sojourn in Germany, he had attempted to give Marie amusements, such as the perpetually hard-up condition of her parents had prevented them from affording her.

When Marie entered Esmée's studio, Rayner, who was ensconced in an armchair, advanced to meet the newcomer. In a flash he realized that Marie had developed into a beautiful woman, that her figure was superb, and that her features were regular and well-proportioned. It troubled him to notice the sad droop of her bow-shaped mouth and, attributing her sorrow to loneliness, he resolved, if possible, to cheer her as he had done in her childhood. He invited Marie and Esmée to spend a day with him on the river, and although Esmée refused, as he hoped she would, from Marie he would take nothing but acceptance. "Any day will suit me," he pleaded. "That is within the next three weeks. If it rains we can lunch together in town instead. I want to talk over old days, and I'd like you to give me as much time as you can spare during my short stay in London, for I leave for Bombay three weeks to-day."

Marie could find no means of escape, and agreed to spend her first free day with her old playmate. With Esmée's assistance, she managed to conceal from him the existence of her child, and also the nature of her work. While he escorted her in a cab to Cynthia's door, Marie gave Tom to understand that she lived in a home for business girls where men visitors could not be received.

As he walked to his lodgings, after taking leave of

Marie, Rayner wondered whether she would consent to become his bride. Although he had been unable to discover from Esmée the exact nature of Marie's employment, he gathered that it was in some way connected with music. From his remembrance of the Drayton ménage, Rayner felt convinced that her parents had left Marie ill-provided, and he hated to think of her fighting for existence alone in the great metropolis. It never occurred to Tom that, of necessity, as she grew older, Marie must have absorbed from the father she adored a portion, anyway, of her parent's unconventional ideas and that, at twenty-two, she must have changed as much mentally as she had altered physically from the small child he remembered.

The day on which Marie was to meet Tom proved gloriously fine, such a day as poets sing of. At Staines, Tom hired a punt, crammed the luncheon basket from the hotel with every delicacy that he thought might tempt Marie's appetite, and skilfully manipulated the craft towards a backwater, where he had picnicked frequently on holidays, when employed in London before going to India. The scent of the roses, as the boat slid past carefully tended riverside gardens, lulled Marie's wariness—to perfume she was extraordinarily susceptible—and because of the sunshine and the smell of the flowers, both of which stirred her soul, she was a trifle more cordial to Tom than was discreet.

Rayner was flattered by the interest which Marie showed in his account of life out East. He was unaware that she was contrasting his outlook on things Oriental with that of Fancourt, for Donald had confided to Marie his devotion to Indian art and his enthusiasm for the mysticism and symbolism pertaining thereto. Having made himself a slave of his environment, Rayner, fearful of being despised by his companions, had adopted the precaution of concealing his affection for things Indian. This precaution had become second nature to

him. In consequence, forgetting that he was not talking to a British Indian official, but to an art lover, he told Marie that he considered all Indian palaces and temples hopeless dirt traps which, for hygienic reasons, he would gladly replace with modern structures. He pretended to view the Indians themselves through the same lens which he employed to scrutinize their buildings.

Marie managed to stifle Tom's curiosity about her work. She had feared that her motherhood might be betrayed in her appearance, and that if Rayner suspected she had been a man's mistress he would esteem her a light woman. Touched by the affectionate manner in which Tom spoke of her father, and his tenderly respectful manner towards herself, Marie forgave Tom's crudeness of outlook.

It was late in the afternoon before Marie could prevail upon Tom to return to London. He tried to persuade her to dine with him at Staines and catch the last train to town, but she would not consent. She feared that, at a *tête-à-tête* dinner, stimulated by wine and her proximity, he might work up to an emotional climax, such as she desired at all costs to avoid. She did not anticipate, however, the proposal of marriage that Tom made in the first-class compartment, into which, unobserved by Marie, he had bribed the guard to lock them. It hurt her to inflict pain on her friend who, she felt, was honesty and kind-heartedness personified, yet she knew that she would be wicked as well as foolish to think of accepting his offer. Nothing but tragedy could result from her marriage with a man she did not love. Moreover, there was Olga. Was the first temptation that presented itself to turn her from the path of duty, to make her forsake her sacred trust, the upbringing of her child? Never. On the plea of devotion to her career, Marie Drayton refused Tom Rayner's hand as she had refused Donald Fancourt's—for the sake of an ideal.

"Marie, darling, think it over," pleaded Rayner, as the

train neared Waterloo Station. "Without you, life will be just a lonesome blank."

"Thank you, dear," said Marie gently.

"When can I see you again?"

"I'll write you, but, Tom dear, my answer won't change. It's bound to be 'no.'"

Before Rayner realized what Marie was doing, for his back was towards her as he collected his hat and newspapers from the luggage rack, she had jumped from the train before it came to a standstill, hurried into the crowd of passengers streaming towards the platform barrier, and was lost. Hastily Tom collected his belongings and made his way to the exit, but Marie was nowhere to be seen. As he put his hand into his pocket to pay the cabman, who drove him to his lodgings, Rayner drew forth something soft. It was a pair of Marie's kid gloves which she had asked him to take care of while they were in the punt. Hastily he thrust them back so that they should not be profaned by the common gaze. The same night, however, in his solitary chambers he drew them forth again. Slowly unrolling them, he stroked his cheek and forehead, vainly endeavouring to believe that Marie's soft fingers were caressing him.

When she reached the street, Marie jumped into the first West-End bus she saw. Having ascertained that Rayner was not following her, she debated with herself what to do next. She wanted to obtain the benefit of an outside opinion, to discuss her case with an expert. At the particular cross-road of life at which she now found herself, with mind facing both ways, she felt that Cynthia would be an unreliable guide. Marie had no wish to be pushed, as she knew Cynthia would push her, towards an altar at which Tom Rayner, frock-coated, silk-hatted, white-button holed, would be awaiting her with mind, she imagined, as conventional as his dress.

Marie glanced at her watch. It was eight o'clock. She would take her chance of finding Esmée at home.

Esmée was the only person in whom she could confide, the only person she knew capable of understanding, of sympathizing, of assisting.

Esmée's studio had not been altered since the May night, two years earlier, when Marie had first suspected Ralph of infidelity, and Esmée greeted Marie affectionately. Between the two women was a tie of friendship that could not be severed by pacings up and down different platforms of life's railway station.

"Did you go to Cynthia's before coming on here this evening?"

Marie shook her head.

"Then you don't know what I've been up to to-day; I've been painting Olga's portrait."

"What?"

"Yes, indeed. I hope you don't mind that I borrowed Olga without your permission, but I was in such a hurry that I couldn't wait till you came back."

"Of course I don't mind. I'm only too proud that you think Olga worth painting," Marie replied. "Tell me all about it."

"Well last night John asked me if I could let a friend of his have by to-night, to-night, mind you, a poster for a baby's new food. John seemed so keen on my undertaking the job that I couldn't well refuse, although I loathe working against time. So I agreed. During the night I decided to make a really pretty study, as well as a good advertisement, by painting your Olga and John's and my Jane together, to illustrate the splendid effects of the food on a child of sixteen months, and a child of six months, for Jane is just ten months younger than Olga."

"But what a topping idea! I'm thrilled at the thought of Olga's picture as a baby appearing on hoardings, and hope that it's merely a case of coming events casting their shadows before—heralding the day when her portrait as a great pianist will appear," said Marie

excitedly. "I hope you'll let me have a copy of the poster when it's printed."

"Of course, and I'll sign it for you. In the meantime, I can show you something better than the drawing and that's the originals."

"Why, is Olga here?"

"By the time I'd finished the advertisement it was the babies' bedtime, so I sent off a messenger to Cynthia. In my note to her, I told her that I was keeping Olga to spend the night here with Jane, as she's done before, and asked Cynthia to tell you on your return that Olga'd be back in the morning." As Marie raised no protest, Esmée asked, "By the way, are you famished, or shall we go and look at the kiddies before supper?"

"Let's go and see them now," said Marie. "If you can spare time afterwards, I want to have a chat with you about my own affairs."

"Why don't you spend the night here, too? John's not coming over, and there's a bed in his dressing-room where you can sleep."

Marie required no second invitation. "Cynthia, won't worry," she said, "for I've a latchkey, and nobody ever sits up for me."

Esmée, more Juno-like of proportions than ever in the glory of young motherhood, led the way into Jane's nursery. Both children were asleep, and over them watched a cheerful, gypsy-looking girl, a one-time model. While Olga was a golden-haired, violet-eyed, blush-rose cherub, Jane was a Murillo baby, with dark hair, eyes resembling brown velvet and a skin recalling the soft tints of sun-baked marble. Both children bore the twofold hall-mark of physical soundness and mental alertness, stamped upon them by the enthusiastic love with which they had been begotten.

"Esmée, I've had a proposal of marriage," said Marie, as the two friends sipped their coffee after their evening meal.

"Well, I suppose you refused."

"Yes, I did refuse Tom Rayner to-day," Marie replied, "but he begged me to reconsider my decision, and I'm beginning to fear I may waver and succumb to the temptation of the settled home that I should secure by marrying him."

"And be false to yourself and to your ideals? What about Olga and her career? Are all your plans for her future to be laid aside, ignored? Come, come, Marie, what's happening to you? It's the effect of the goody-goody, unnatural atmosphere of Cynthia's home. What you want is a young ardent lover, one who'll appreciate your talents and your artistic tastes and won't impinge upon your plans for Olga. But, my dear, you as 'Mrs. Rayner'! The idea's ridiculous! You and Tom have no fundamentals in common upon which to base a partnership supposed to be lifelong."

Marie flushed guiltily. "I'm ashamed of myself for being such a fool as to think of Rayner as a husband. I don't know what made me contemplate the idea for a second."

"Too much continence is as bad for a woman as it is for a man," said Esmée. "If I were you, I'd go back to the stage now that you know how to take care of yourself. It was all very well for you to work with Cynthia while Olga was so young that you couldn't be parted from her. When I got Cynthia to help you, however, I never contemplated that you were going to stay with her for good. She'll turn you into a missionary hag if you remain with her much longer. You're already getting a terribly earnest-Christian sort of expression."

"I don't see how I'm to alter as long as I'm living with Cynthia."

"Get away from her then, as soon as you jolly well can. Buy a set of cosmetics, they're a woman's best friend when used judiciously. I thought you possessed too much sense to ignore God's blessings to the sophisticated."

The next morning, before leaving Esmée's home, Marie wrote Rayner a letter which she had composed during a sleepless night. Her conscience smote her for the abrupt manner in which she had separated from him on the previous evening. She was resolved, however, to shut him out of her life, once and for all, so that there should be no further matrimonial discussions to tread down her powers of resistance. After thanking Tom for his hospitality, and apologizing for her flight from the railway carriage, Marie repeated her rejection of his offer of marriage, again stating that she felt unable to abandon her career and artistic interests.

"Offer to be a sister to him," suggested Esmée, chuckling. "That'll choke him off better than anything else."

"I couldn't do that, dear, for it'd sound as though I were laughing at him. I hate hurting his feelings, he's been so jolly good to me."

"All right, have it your own way, but don't blame me if he comes pestering you."

But Tom Rayner did not pester. On receipt of Marie's letter, his face became strangely drawn, and two fresh lines appeared round his mouth. The next morning he left London for Paris *en route* to Bombay.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAESTRO

"If Grafburg is the only place where Olga can receive a musical training, such as you consider adequate, why can't you leave her there and come back to me?" Cynthia pleaded.

Marie shook her head. "I don't see how it's to be done," she said, "that is, if Petroff thinks she's worth training. If he does, I must remain with Olga, for she's too young to be left alone. Of course, if he tells me that Olga's talent isn't first-rate, I'll bring her straight back to London, give her a commercial education and try to make her a successful business woman. I'll take jolly good care too to stop her music, for unless she can be at the very top of the tallest tree she'll be far happier without any musical knowledge. Mediocrities in art are anathema to me."

"I see your point," admitted Cynthia, "but I need you so awfully badly here. Besides, you'd be miserable without a job, and I'd try to give you a salary in addition to your out-of-pocket expenses. That'd help you to pay for Olga's board and lodging in Grafburg. I'm sure you'll have no difficulty in finding a nice family to look after her, for she's such a darling that she compels love."

"Don't try to dissuade me, dear," Marie replied. "I've decided to go back to the stage, for I can't afford to be idle and hope to find employment in Grafburg."

"I hate the idea of your returning to theatrical life," protested Cynthia, "though, perhaps, I'm silly. So many of the girls, who've passed through my hands for a moral wash-and-brush-up, first got soiled through

being stage-struck, that I'm really frightened of the lure of the footlights."

"One thing you can be certain of. I shan't find stage life any worse in Germany than in England. Indeed, I'm almost bound to find it better, for the Germans take art and artistes far more seriously than we do."

"Of course, you know more about such things than I do," said Cynthia grudgingly.

"A few weeks back I wrote to my old singing master, Ernst Schlumper, who gave me the idea of the *chansons dansantes* with which I made my début, and asked him whether he could find me work." Marie drew from her bag an envelope with the Grafburg postmark. "Here's his answer. He writes that if *Püppchen*, "Little Doll," as he used to call me, can still sing French, German, and Italian patter songs, with dances interspersed, he'll be able to get me some bookings. Anyway, he'll do his best, and what's more his brother-in-law, the great pianist Petroff, will test Olga's ear and hear her play. You know that Nina Weber, with whom Olga has been having piano and theory lessons for the past two years, is a pupil of Petroff. Well, Nina has written to Petroff that she considers my baby to have greater talent than any other child she has taught. Nina's an expert at training kids, and Petroff places great faith in her opinion, so it's on the strength of her recommendation that he's going to examine Olga. It's a tremendous honour, you know, for Petroff's word's law in the piano world, and he scarcely ever consents to hear beginners." Marie's eyes sparkled as she added, "I'm almost dizzy with delight when I think of it, for it was awful cheek of me to try and approach the great man."

"How splendid!" Cynthia tried to appear enthusiastic, but it was a poor effort. "I suppose I must get used to the idea of working without you then," she continued. "I've no right to try and dissuade you

from doing what you deem to be the best thing for Olga and yourself. All I can say is, if ever you want to come back, as long as I'm alive, there'll always be a home for you and Olga, and a loving heart to welcome you both."

Marie clasped Cynthia's hands gratefully. "Dearest, you're most generous, and though I wouldn't be human not to be delighted about Petroff's promise to hear Olga, my heart cracks each time I remember that, if he reports favourably, it means my separation from you and the useful work I've been doing."

At the special request of the inmates of Cynthia's home, Marie arranged to leave London on a Sunday morning, so that the girls, free from their various employments, might be at the station to see her off.

The men passengers cast interested glances at Marie, although she was simply dressed, as she walked with her superb gait down the platform. Beside her strutted Olga, very proud of a black velvet pelisse and bonnet to match, that enhanced the brilliant gold of her curls. In appearance, Olga bore an uncanny resemblance to her father. For this reason, Marie was glad to transplant the child to a soil where there was no danger of Olga's likeness to Longford betraying the secret of her relationship to him.

Olga, a friendly little mortal, who had inherited much of the personal charm of both father and mother, prattled gaily to the passengers on board the Flushing-bound boat.

"And where's your father, my dear?" asked a middle-aged spinster, from amid a barricade of rugs and travelling cushions that a jaded lady's maid was disposing about her."

"I'm a widow, my husband died before my little girl was born, and I never mention him to Olga. There'll be plenty of time for her to learn the meaning of sorrow when she's older," interposed Marie abruptly. She

fumed at the impertinent curiosity of the Hon. Dorothea Courcy-Smith, who advertised her name in large letters on every article of her luggage.

"What a strange idea!" commented this soured member of the tragic sisterhood of the unkissed. From beneath her superimposed coats, the Hon. Dorothea produced a lorgnette through which, after gazing disbelievingly at Marie, she proceeded to scan the labels on Marie's luggage. These, however, did not satisfy the Hon. Dorothea's inquisitiveness, for they bore simply the word "Drayton" without any prefix.

"It's time for Olga to have her lunch," said Marie nettled, hustling the little one off to the dining-saloon in the hope that sea-sickness, or the fear of it, would prevent the old maid from following.

Marie saw nothing more of her catechizer, but regarded the incident as a warning to keep the armament of wedding-ring and widowhood ready for further skirmishes with feline females. She had already paved the way in Grafburg by confiding in Schlumper. She had written him that she posed as a widow, "Mrs. Drayton," who, having married a first cousin on her father's side, had retained her maiden name. She had also stated that she wanted Olga to believe this story until the child was old enough to know the truth, but had given Schlumper *carte blanche* to tell Petroff all about her. She guessed correctly that Petroff would be interested only in the fact that Olga was the grand-daughter of his old friend and colleague, Paul Drayton, and would not care a jot whether the little girl was born in or out of wedlock.

To Marie's relief, Olga proved an excellent traveller. Neither rough sea nor long railway journey had any ill effects on mother and daughter, so that when they reached Grafburg, flushed with excitement, they both looked their best. Schlumper and his wife, who was Petroff's sister, met the travellers and carried them off to a friend's flat which was to be their home.

"If you'd been alone, *Püppchen*," explained Schlumper, "you'd have been our guest, *nicht wahr*¹, Vera?"

Frau Schlumper beamed assent.

"Vera and I are too busy teaching, and far too old to look after a little girl like Olga when you're away at work," Schlumper continued, "so we've arranged for you to live with Madame Mociusko, a widow. She's a Roumanian Jewess who, in her youth, was a ballerina in Bucharest. She lives alone with her son, Otto, who being business manager of a theatre is away from home a great deal. Madame is delighted to have somebody to keep her company, for, although she has lived in Grafburg ever since her marriage, and speaks German as easily as her own language, she hasn't many friends. She adores children, so in her home Olga 'll be well looked after."

Madame Mociusko, a motherly, energetic woman of fifty-five years of age, welcomed the party very cordially, and by the time the Schlumpers had satisfied themselves as to Marie's comfort, it was Olga's bedtime. While Madame Mociusko and Gretchen, the cheerful maid-of-all-work, insisted upon giving the child her bath, Schlumper took Marie on one side and explained that, before hearing Olga, Petroff wished to have a chat with Olga's mother. It was arranged that, escorted by her old music master, Marie would call upon the pianist on the following afternoon, and she endeavoured to calm her nervousness by forcing her mind to dwell on the relief she would experience when her suspense with regard to Olga's future was at an end.

Next day, Marie left Olga happily engrossed in making music books for dolls, with the assistance of Madame Mociusko, who had stolen some of her son's business notepaper for the purpose.

"*Püppchen*, my dear, Petroff is really interested in you and Olga," said Schlumper encouragingly on the way to

¹ "Isn't that so?"

the interview that might prove the turntable of Marie's and Olga's lives. "He remembers you as a small child, and often speaks of your father, whom he first knew when Drayton and he were studying under Liszt."

Petroff lived in an old-fashioned house, built originally by a former Grand Duke of Beiringen for a favourite mistress, and altered by the virtuoso to suit his desire for absolute privacy when practising and composing. The principal rooms on the ground floor had been converted into a studio, where the pianist gave pupils' concerts, invitations to which were greatly in request, for Petroff fed the concert halls of the world. Drayton had inculcated in his daughter his own veneration for his great contemporary, and Marie felt over-awed as she entered the apartment that, to her, was the shrine of a superman. Katya, Petroff's woman secretary, who might have been any age between twenty and sixty, regulated the traffic bound for the master's sanctuary. Overjoyed at meeting her old friend, Marie, however, Katya for once made a mistake, and ushered Schlumper and his companion into the studio while Petroff was occupied with another guest. Before realizing her error, the secretary hurried away to attend to other callers, and consequently, Marie and Schlumper sat down to wait until the virtuoso was disengaged. Petroff was seated at one of two grand pianos that occupied the greater part of the platform. The leonine head, which Marie had last seen covered with bushy, black hair, was surmounted with iron-grey locks, that enhanced the dignity of the expressive face of the musician.

"His hair turned grey with sorrow," Schlumper whispered, "after a great fire in America, in which his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchild were burnt to death."

The room was so large that there was no risk of Schlumper's *sotto voce* remarks being overheard by the *maestro*, who was deep in discussion with an American

concert agent, but Marie made no reply. The conversation between Petroff and his visitor engrossed her attention so much that she forgot she was eavesdropping.

"I've told you repeatedly that I don't wish to tour any more," said Petroff testily, "now that my children are gone, I don't require money. I've no one to leave it to, and the journeys are too troublesome. When my son was with me, I enjoyed travelling, for I felt I was preparing the way for him, and also for my grand-daughter to take my place. Now I'm alone, I prefer to remain in my own appreciative circle in Grafburg. Thank God, I've no longer any need to hawk my wares around the music markets of the world."

"Well, anyway, *Maestro*," the New Yorker replied, "I'll stay right here in Grafburg till you decide to discuss terms, and I guess I can fix up rates that'll seem good to you. Why, my firm's gotten a noo advertising stunt. Gosh! It's a swell idea! See! Special illuminated posters with you playing on your Steinway grand, your hair standing out with excitement, so that every woman in the audience'll go crazy with eagerness to try and get a lock. Gee! It's a bum idea and it'll draw some! I've the captions o' some o' the press boostings right here to show you. Why, those noospapers guys'll get a rare kick out of 'em and I'm telling you."

Despite his irritation, Petroff laughed. "I'm much afraid you must expend your ingenuity on a worthier subject," he retorted. "I don't want to go back to America for it's a land of regret to me. There everything is too big, even the audiences. They pay to hear me and applaud, it's true, but only because I'm the fashion. No, no, I say, I'm determined to spend the last years of my life in the peaceful enjoyment and pursuit of my art, amongst the few who can appreciate it, encouraged by the Grand Duke whom I've the honour to count amongst my sympathetic friends."

Marie watched Petroff intently. Despite his anger, he

retained his dignity. About him was nothing of the rant and rage supposed to be the prerogative of musicians—just a wealth of disdain in his musical voice that completely quashed the arguments of the New Yorker. Her blood ran cold at the idea, which struck her for the first time, that even world-fame, such as Petroff's, does not necessarily bring happiness. Possibly, even if her own ambitions for her daughter were fulfilled, Olga, though a celebrity, might not be contented.

Petroff suddenly caught sight of Marie and dismissed his uninvited guest abruptly. "Ah, here is Schlumper's *Püppchen*," he exclaimed, shaking Marie warmly by the hand. "I remember you, my dear, when I used to come round to your father's studio. You'll be pleased to know that the concerto he wrote for me proved one of my greatest successes on my last concert tour. But why stand? Come and sit down and Katya'll bring us tea, while we talk about old times and about your little girl."

Schlumper had already excused himself on the plea of business, so that Marie and the pianist were left alone together.

"I'm an old man, my dear," said Petroff. He seated himself beside Marie and crushed her small fingers between his powerful, muscular, supple hands that, according to rumour, had been insured against accident for £10,000. "You mustn't mind if I talk to you as I would to a daughter."

"I'll be only too grateful for any advice you give me. You see I'm alone in the world, and I'm most desperately anxious to do what's best for my little girl."

"I've undertaken to test your child's ear, for I have great faith in Nina Weber. I warn you, though, if I don't think that the little one shows the greatest promise I'll be perfectly frank, and not only refuse to train her myself but advise you not to have her trained at all. My pet grievance is the imbecility of forcing children who've no musical talent to desecrate the noblest of the

arts. One of the first luxuries I indulged in when I could afford it, was to refuse to give lessons to talentless fools who wanted to attach to their names the label: 'Petroff's pupil'!" The pianist's eyes flashed indignantly.

"I entirely agree with you," remarked Marie timidly.

"Now, my child, what about Olga? You'll bring her here to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock. Does she know that I'm going to hear her play?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps that's a pity. It may make her nervous."

"I don't think it'll do that. She hasn't the slightest fear of performing before people, for she's so interested in her music that she gives no thought to the audience and is really unaware of its existence. Nina Weber used to make her play continually before strangers and I know that, at the audition to-morrow, it's I who'll be nervous, not she."

"Ah, that's a very good sign. A true musician should have no thought of anything but the work he's interpreting," said Petroff authoritatively. "I've no patience with mock artistes who allow the presence of hearers, or the fear of hearers' judgment, to come between their music and themselves and disturb their concentration."

Petroff moved to the pianos, and examined them carefully. "I've given orders that a pedal attachment, such as I invented for the use of Nina's pupils, should be attached to one of the pianos, for I take it Olga's legs are not long enough for her to reach the pedals in the ordinary position."

"How very kind and thoughtful of you!" exclaimed Marie gratefully. "I was afraid to trouble you, but this detail's really very important. Olga has been taught to pedal very carefully with the help of your contrivance. Without it, she might be put out and fail to do herself justice."

At this juncture Katya entered, and while the secretary poured out tea from a polished copper samovar, Petroff searched in a portfolio. He eventually produced a photograph of a group of Liszt's students. In the front row, one on each side of the master, sat Petroff and Drayton. "Drayton, dear wild Irishman, was one of my best friends. All down the years, though travel and other work often separated us, I always maintained my love for him," said the Russian.

"And he maintained his for you," Marie replied warmly.

"Our affection for each other was due to the great man we both adored," replied Petroff, pointing to a magnificent bust of Liszt that occupied a place of honour in front of the platform. "It was Liszt who taught us the value of ideals."

When tea was over, Petroff rose from his seat and said regretfully, "Now, *Püppchen*, I'm sorry to say I must let you go, for I'm playing to-night at the palace. You must remember that the Grand Duke is a true music lover."

On her return to Madame Mociusko's, Marie found Olga playing on an ancient rattlebox of a piano to an admiring audience consisting of Madame and Gretchen.

"Herr Gott, *wie wunderbar sie spielt!*"¹ exclaimed Madame as Marie entered. "Petroff will surely make her his pupil."

"I wonder," said Marie timorously. Now that she was away from the glamour of Petroff's personality, fear at her own audacity began to play havoc with her nerves.

"Keep your hands under the rug, darling, I want them to be warm, otherwise you can't play your best," said Marie to Olga, as mother and daughter drove to the audition the following afternoon.

"My hands are quite warm," the child replied, obediently placing them under a fur wrap which Madame

¹ "Lord God, how wonderfully she plays!"

Mociusko had lent to Olga. "I won't have to play with music, will I, Mummy? When I have music in front of me I can't listen properly to what I'm playing."

"No, of course, you'll play by heart just as you do at Auntie Nina's concerts."

As Marie had predicted, the child was perfectly unperturbed by the prospect of performing before Petroff, who, so her mother had told her, had been a friend of her grandfather. Marie had also instructed the little girl to address the virtuoso as "*Maestro*," the title by which Petroff was known to his friends and pupils.

As soon as they entered Petroff's house, Marie endeavoured to make Olga warm her hands on one of the two huge porcelain stoves that kept the studio well warmed, for owing to his many hours of sedentary work, practising and composing, Petroff suffered much from the cold. Olga, however, had other things to occupy her mind besides warm hands, and evaded her mother. Everything fascinated her—the two concert grand pianos side by side, the upright grand at the back of the stage, the specially designed electric lights that illuminated the keyboards without irritating the eyes of the listeners, the glass-doored cupboards filled with neatly bound volumes of music, the gilded laurel wreaths with satin streamers bearing the names of the donors. After ecstatic admiration of these and other articles, which the child realized were connected with her beloved music, Olga paused in front of the bust of Franz Liszt, whose face she recognized from the portrait of the master in her mother's room.

Petroff, who, unobserved by mother and daughter, had entered by a side door, listened with great interest to Olga's exclamations of delight. "So your little one recognizes our great master," he said, advancing and shaking Marie warmly by the hand. "You're certainly bringing her up on the right path." Petroff kissed Olga

on both cheeks and, changing from German into English, bade the child follow him to the grand piano to which had been added the pedal attachment.

Olga allowed Petroff to lift her on to the seat, the height of which he adjusted until the child declared that she was comfortable.

Marie watched the virtuoso with amazement. He was so gentle, so homely, so unaffected, that she could scarce believe he was the same man who had extinguished the American's eloquence on the previous day.

Turning to Marie, Petroff asked her what pieces Olga had learnt by heart.

Marie handed him a leather case containing a large selection of music, that included a Mozart pianoforte *concerto*, adapted by Nina Weber to suit Olga's childish hands which were exceptionally long-fingered. "Olga knows all the movements and is accustomed to hearing the orchestral accompaniment played by Nina on a second piano," Marie explained. "She also plays by heart the short pieces of Bach, Schubert, and Schumann that are in her case."

"*Sehr gut, wir werden mal sehen*,"¹ said Petroff.

Marie crept to a seat near the bust of Liszt. She hoped that the sight of the well-loved face would give her strength to sit through the ordeal without betraying nervousness.

Petroff first tested Olga's ear by playing notes and intervals on the upright piano behind the child. Next came musical dictation. Olga wrote down, without a single mistake, simple phrases and intervals struck by the virtuoso. Concurrently with pot-hooks and hangers, Olga had learnt to write music, for she had evinced a remarkable gift for improvisation and, with uncanny ease, had acquired the ability to record her ideas on paper. There followed the practical test. Olga interpreted the solo part of the Mozart *concerto* while Petroff

¹ "Good, we'll soon see."

supplied the accompaniment on the second grand piano. The *maestro* marvelled at the discrimination shown by the tiny performer in her treatment of the first and second subjects, and her skill in replying to the orchestral passages. She interpreted the slow movement with a wealth of feeling and a caressing touch amazing in one so young, while her eyes sparkled with enjoyment as she attacked the finale, crisply and firmly.

When she had finished, Olga looked up smilingly into Petroff's face. "I love to hear the piano and orchestra talk to each other, don't you?" she said. Her voice and manner were those of a small child, but Petroff noted that the sacred fire of genius burnt in her violet eyes.

"May I play this?" Olga next asked, pointing to a Schubert valse. "I know what it's all about," she added, "for Auntie Nina showed me a picture of ladies in funny dresses and gentlemen in tight trousers dancing to this tune."

At the conclusion of the valse, unbidden, Olga commenced a simplified version of Liszt's famous third *Liebestraum*, inspired by Freiligrath's poem to love. Under her childish fingers the melody swelled and died away with a passionate emotion that only a true musician could display.

"That'll do, dear," said Petroff, kissing Olga after the final chord. "I see that the breath of the master has descended upon you."

Olga returned his embrace. Then she said timidly: "*Maestro*, will you please lift me up to kiss Liszt? I want to thank him for helping me to play."

Petroff did as the child asked. "By that kiss you dedicate your life to your art," he remarked solemnly, more to himself than to the little girl.

After Petroff released her, Olga scrambled on to her mother's lap. "I'm so happy," she exclaimed, "and I'll try to be good."

"Run along now, dear," said Petroff gently, "Katya's waiting for you. She can't speak very good English, but she's fond of little girls, and has some funny little gingerbread men for your tea."

As soon as they were alone, Marie looked questioningly at Petroff. Would his verdict be favourable? She dared not ask.

Taking Marie's hand in his, the musician said solemnly, "My dear, if I'm not mistaken you've brought a genius into the world. Please God, I may live long enough to hand down to her the tradition that it was my privilege to inherit from Franz Liszt, your father's guide and mine."

Sinking to her knees at Petroff's feet, Marie seized the *maestro's* mighty hands in hers and covered them with kisses.

CHAPTER VIII

AN APOSTLE OF THE NUDE

HAD it been Otto Mociusko's custom to swear, he would have used a volley of the spiciest expletives and still have failed to express the full measure of his disgust, as he replaced the telephone receiver in his office at the *New Art Theatre*. Long since, however, Otto had discarded lurid language, not on moral, but on philosophical grounds, because he found it brought him no relief when throttling the annoyances that seemed to him to be the main constituents of his existence. With an expressive shrug he obeyed the telephonic summons which, as he expected, was from his employer, Boris Vronsky, the impresario and lessee of the *New Art Theatre*. For the ninth time that day Otto hastened to Vronsky's private office. He noted that it was already three o'clock and determined, in future to bring a packet of *belegter Brödchen*,¹ and abandon the idea of returning home for his principal meal until the new item, *The Fountain of Bacchus*, was cast, rehearsed and produced. It was the same old story. Whenever Vronsky gave birth to a new number his business manager was as harassed and bullied as though he were an incompetent midwife, whose bungling was about to destroy the infant.

As soon as Mociusko entered the impresario's office Vronsky set up a quick-fire bombardment of questions as to expenses and contracts, to which Otto, armed with costing-ledgers, budgets, and estimates, was able to give replies that satisfied even his pernickety chief. Bidding the business manager wait, Vronsky next dictated a few

¹The German equivalent of sandwiches.

short, crisp, and very-much-to-the-point letters to a young man stenographer. He refused to have a girl about his office, maintaining that he had more than enough of women on the stage. Then the impresario slackened. From a Juggernaut car, crushing all obstacles both animate and inanimate in its path, Vronsky relaxed into what he was by birth, a Russian aristocrat, converted by education and experience into a polished citizen of the world.

"I'm in a quandary," remarked Vronsky confidentially. "I want another girl for *The Fountain of Bacchus*, and I'm damned if I can find one with a good enough figure in this Germany of bulging females, most of whom look as though they are suffering from advanced pregnancy or elephantiasis. If I tested one yesterday, I tested twenty—all hopeless!" Here Vronsky glanced through a pile of photographs on his writing-table. "These are what my agent in Berlin sent me," he said, handing the photographs to Mociusko. "It's not worth my while paying the expenses of any of these girls to come to Grafburg for an interview. They're bad enough to look at in tights. Without them, they'd be positively hideous."

Otto vouchsafed no reply, fearful of increasing the pain in Boris's temper by interruption.

"I'm getting desperate," Vronsky continued. "If I don't find a decent-figured girl on Monday, at my final test, I'll have to wire to Petersburg and import one, I suppose. I hate the idea, for I've no confidence in other people's judgment where my work's concerned, and detest booking performers second-hand."

Otto, who was an overworked, prematurely middle-aged man of twenty-eight, was not usually interested in the opposite sex, despite the many opportunities of womanizing that presented themselves to him at the theatre. Marie Drayton, however, so fascinated him that he was eager to act as a carpet between her dainty feet and the rough stones on life's highway. He had

learnt from Schlumper that the singing master's hopes of finding Marie employment were unlikely to materialize, and knew that Marie was in very straitened circumstances and in urgent need of paid employment. Mociusko wondered if he had now a chance to help her. It was a ticklish problem. Marie was so refined, but she was also so anxious to earn money. Would she consent to work in the *New Art Theatre*? Vronsky would treat her all right, but would she agree to appear undraped?

"There was one girl who might have passed muster," Vronsky continued, "but she had a fool of a mother, who kicked up such a row because her daughter's only covering would be a flesh-coloured wisp or a girdle of vine leaves, that I got Stanin to turn the pair out."

It was just like Boris to get Stanin, the stage-manager, to do his dirty work, Otto reflected. Anxious to pacify Vronsky, however, and still more anxious to assist Marie Drayton, Mociusko ventured to make a suggestion, "There's an English girl I know who might suit you. She's a lady, respectable and all that sort of thing, so, of course, I've never had any chance to inspect her figure closely, but she's well-built, and I know she's had stage experience."

"Oh," said Vronsky, "what more can you tell me about her?"

Manlike, Otto hated to discuss with a stranger his ideal woman. He would have liked to place Marie and her affairs in a post-box of which he alone possessed the key. Still, in his desire to secure her employment that would keep her in Grafburg, Otto acted as assistant surgeon while Boris, with professional skill, dissected the image of Marie Drayton.

"She sounds worth interviewing," Boris remarked. "Interview" was the euphemistic designation applied by Vronsky, to his critical scrutiny of each girl who, aspiring to a rôle in the *New Art Company*, was obliged to appear undressed before him.

For a Slav, Vronsky was singularly cold-blooded and gloried in the fact, maintaining that a producer of turns featuring nude girls should lack interest in women. Though in his twenties, Vronsky had experienced some difficulty in putting this precept into practice, by the time he was thirty-five, the age at which he resolved to surpass all his previous daring and artistry by staging *The Fountain of Bacchus*, Boris regarded the undraped women who paraded before him, with the dispassionate eye of a painter selecting a model. He subordinated all interests to the acquisition of wealth and power, regarding the members of his staff merely as so many tools for the achievement of his aims.

"Of course I don't know whether Mrs. Drayton'd like to join your cast," Otto continued. "I'm certain she's never appeared in the nude before."

"That's highly probable," retorted Vronsky, "you seem to forget that I pride myself upon being the theatrical pioneer of naked living pictures and sculptures. If your friend's a prude, she's no use to me. If she's a sensible young woman, who knows the value of money, and how hard it is to earn decent wages, send her along. You can tell her that I pay good prices for good material, sufficient for a woman to live upon in comfort, without being compelled to supplement her income by becoming a prostitute and losing her good looks." Vronsky laughed cynically. "I learnt long since that love for sale soon damages physical beauty."

"I know you're most generous in your pay to the girls you employ," said Otto ingratiatingly, hoping thereby to apply a brake to the Juggernaut car. Mociusko was so weary that he feared he would lose his self-control did the Russian start once more to heckle. "May I bring Mrs. Drayton to see you before I speak to her about the possibility of her joining your cast?" he continued timorously.

"What's the idea?"

"Well, you see, Mrs. Drayton and her little girl are living with my mother as paying guests. Now, if Marie Drayton attends one of your tests and you turn her down, she may want me to persuade you to reconsider your decision or, in other ways, make a nuisance of herself. As I see her daily, she'd have lots of opportunities to bother us."

"Well, my dear fellow, you don't expect me to book your protégée without seeing her, do you?"

Otto was so anxious to save Marie the humiliation of being subjected to Boris's intimate examination and then rejected, that he plucked up sufficient courage to suggest that he should introduce Marie to Vronsky, so that the Russian could judge of her appearance before broaching to her the subject of employment.

Vronsky's curiosity had been aroused by his business manager's evident enthusiasm for Marie. He reflected that the woman who could stir the blood of the anaemic Roumanian must be out of the common ruck and worth while investigating. On the other hand, if her appearance were quite impossible, and Boris was sceptical about Otto's capabilities as a judge of feminine beauty, time would be saved if Marie did not attend the test on the following Monday. "All right," said Vronsky grudgingly, "bring your fairy to the show to-morrow night. Try to ascertain her opinion about it and about the girls taking part. If she's neither shocked nor supercilious, you can bring her round to the back after, and I'll run my eye over her. Get her to wear evening dress. You're certain she's had stage experience? I haven't time to train anyone who's footlight-shy."

"She told me she worked on the London music-halls at one time."

"All right, English girls are often good-looking."

Even his admirers did not deny that Vronsky was a supreme egoist. His own successes filled his horizon to the exclusion of all other matters, and he worshipped his

own interests more assiduously than the heathen their idols. In this respect he resembled Longford, but there the similarity between the Englishman and the Russian ended. Longford, less ambitious and more frivolous than Vronsky, rarely, if ever, allowed business to interfere with pleasure. Vronsky, on the contrary, never allowed pleasure to dislocate business and, indeed, took little delight in anything but his work which was also his hobby and his mistress.

On the death of his father, a Ukranian prince, heavily in debt, Boris had abandoned his university career for the stage for which, from earliest childhood, he had evinced a consuming passion. By dint of hard work and supreme ability Vronsky, at the age of thirty, was at the helm of a repertory company which, under his guidance, toured profitably throughout Russia. On his return to St. Petersburg, feeling that his foothold was secure, Boris began his *New Art* campaign, with its hark-back to nature and its abandonment of the stereotyped and the artificial. Because of his aristocratic connections and charming manners, Vronsky had captivated the Grand Duke of Beiringen, who was an assiduous patron of the theatre, and anxious for his capital to be as noted an artistic haven as Weimar in the days of Goethe. Finding the Duke a live-wire patron, who in art sought consolation for the death of his young wife, the astute Russian had persuaded the ruler to permit him to organize a *New Art Theatre*, and had obtained a seven years' lease of a ramshackle theatre. With a State grant, Vronsky had rebuilt it to his own design, installing every modern facility for his productions. Generous with State funds, the overlord of Beiringen had offered Vronsky a subsidy for the term of his lease, but this the impresario had refused. Vronsky was resolved to retain a free hand to deal with his staff as he pleased without Government interference. Moreover, the Duke's frequent donations amounted to more than

the proposed subsidy, and left Boris at liberty to rule as dictator.

At the time of Marie's arrival in Grafburg, in the autumn of 1906, Vronsky's undertaking had been a flourishing concern for over six years, and his work had won golden opinions from the younger set. Boris hoped that his new production, *The Fountain of Bacchus*, would result in lengthy bookings and fat cheques in Western Europe and America. He kept these castles in the air to himself, for except under compulsion, he confided in nobody.

Sunk deep in the slough of depression, Marie had lost interest in everything but her search for work. Nevertheless, she agreed to accompany Otto to the *New Art Theatre* when she noticed that he looked hurt by her refusal. As they entered the auditorium, Marie remarked that the audience consisted of art enthusiasts, whose seriousness of demeanour indicated that, to them, the building was a temple rather than a place of amusement. When the curtain rose, the stage was in darkness and remained thus for at least two minutes, during which just that expectation was aroused which Vronsky desired. Then, a dim light, that gradually increased, revealed a *Titian Gallery*—living reproductions of those well-known pictures of the great fifteenth-century painter: *Sacred and Profane Love*; *Venus Reclining*; *Venus Reposing*; *Danae* and *The Man with the Glove*. This only male figure amongst the galaxy of nude girls was standing in the centre of the greyish brown backcloth, and recalled in every detail the expression and appearance of his painted model in the Louvre. At the opening of the scene, *The Man with the Glove* was the embodiment of a serious, intelligent youth, one hitherto but little troubled by the stir of the senses. Then he caught sight of *Danae*, unclad as in the Naples Museum. As he gazed Danae raised her arms as though to draw him to her, and he, abashed, though desirous, shifted his position—only to be

confronted by two girls who represented the celebrated Titian Venuses in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence. As his eyes fell upon them in wondering, timorous admiration, these beautiful women left their couches and advanced towards him. In reply to their beckoning, with the speed of a Protean artiste, *The Man with the Glove* threw aside his tight-fitting garments and, as a living statue, proved to be a perfect specimen of an adolescent standing on the threshold of a glorious manhood. As he commenced to dance, first with one Venus, then with the other, Danae too, approached, accompanied by the two gorgeous figures impersonating that pride of the Borghese Gallery, *Sacred and Profane Love*. As the girls garlanded themselves about the man, while the orchestra wailed sense-stirring melodies, the performers might have been celestials frolicking on the slopes of Olympus. The spirit not only of Titian, but of all the splendour of Grecian art, had returned to earth to glorify physical beauty so long vilified by hideous garments. In this dance, as in the work of Titian himself, the spirit of the Renaissance did homage to the spirit of Ancient Greece, and conveyed the joy which the artist must have experienced when immortalizing the beauty of woman's contours, the warm, delicate hues of her flesh, the softness of her body, the luxuriance of her hair, the fragrance of her being resembling the ripe pomegranates that, in Titian's own city of Venice, peep over the walls skirting the canals, to rejoice at their own mature loveliness reflected in the waters below. The spectators were transported to the Elysian Fields, and when the orchestra suddenly broke into the last movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, and a hidden chorus sang the words of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, there was scarcely a dry eye in the house.

When the figures returned to their frames, applause swept the auditorium like a wind storm. Then someone shouted "Producer!" and the cry "Vronsky!" pro-

ceeded from every part of the house. Marie hoped he would take the call, for she longed to see the magician who could thus transport an audience into the realms of fancy. At last Boris appeared, not on the stage, but in his inconspicuous box to which he had direct access from the wings. He looked very slight and young, his aristocratic, clean-shaven face, pale with triumph, which he endeavoured to conceal by bowing with assumed humility to the public. Marie contrasted the refinement of Vronsky's production, and the dignity of his presence, with the blatant vulgarity of the staging in the *Star Music-halls* and the sensual leer of Hobbs, the *deus ex machina* of those entertainments.

A beautiful girl, slightly veiled, next appeared in front of a black curtain, and declaimed to music after the manner of the Greek chorus. When she had retired the black curtain rose to reveal human statuary, *Amor and Psyche*, to view the original of which by Canova, tourists from every corner of the globe pilgrimage to the Villa Carlotta at Cadenabbia. The look of adoration on Amor's face as he bent to kiss Psyche was as arresting in the reproduction as in the original, as though there were something holy in the impress of her finger-tips upon his head. The pose suggested spirituality dominating physical desire.

"How's the boy?" asked Otto of Marie at the conclusion of the *Psyche and Amor* turn, during which he had been compelled to dance attendance upon Vronsky in the green-room.

"Wonderful. Who is he?"

"A Greek. Wallmann, of the Grafburg School of Art, nabbed him on a visit to Athens and employed him as a model. Vronsky's mouth has been watering for the lad ever since Wallmann returned, and at last, through the influence of the Lord Chamberlain, Graf Mühl, Boris was able to snaffle the youngster. He considers the boy one of the greatest assets of the *New Art Company*,

and looks after him as though the kid were a prize racehorse."

"Vronsky must be a most unusual person."

"He certainly is; he's a genius in his own line. Would you care to meet him?"

"I'd love to, if you think he wouldn't mind my taking up his time, while I thank him for the joy his work has caused me."

"Just wait then at the end of the show. I'll see if I can take you behind and introduce him."

When the theatre had emptied, Otto beckoned Marie to join him at one of the stall exits. "We'll go round to Vronsky's office at once," said Mociusko. "We'll catch him before he starts rehearsals."

When Marie and Otto entered Boris's luxurious office-study, the impresario was engaged with an elderly lady and gentleman in evening dress, who had risen to leave.

"I'll write to you, Herr Vronsky, in a day or two, as soon as the Duke decides on what date he can attend the opening performance of your new production, *The Fountain of Bacchus*. He is very keen to be present on the first night."

"Please convey my profound thanks to the Grand Duke. I shall be delighted to open on any night selected by my noble patron," Vronsky replied. "I must also thank you personally Herr Graf, for the trouble you have taken on my behalf."

"That was Count Mühl and the Countess," explained Mociusko as the couple, accompanied by Boris, left the room. The Count's the Duke's uncle and Lord Chamberlain. The ruler looks upon him as a father and really owes all his love of art to the Count's training."

When Vronsky returned, Marie realized that before her was a man difficult to docket, one to whom none of the stock labels of life applied. A master in the handling of people likely to be useful to him, Boris gleaned all the

details he required about Marie's stage experience, without appearing to cross-question her. Having learnt that she was a linguist he decided to make use of her knowledge of languages, should she join his company.

Vronsky then left the room on plea of business and beckoned Mociusko to follow him. "You're right for once," said the Russian, to his business manager when the two were in a deserted waiting-room, "that girl's a peach. Tell her to attend my test on Monday, but prepare her for the scrutiny she'll have to undergo. She strikes me as too sensible to make a fool of herself and play the prude, but best make sure."

"I'll do so and let you have an answer to-morrow," Mociusko replied. "I hope she gets the job."

"So do I," returned Vronsky with unwonted fervour.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOUNTAIN OF BACCHUS

SINCE her departure from England, Marie had been obliged to consume a perturbingly large portion of her nest-egg. Besides travelling expenses, there had been a strong, up-to-date practice piano to hire, a nursery governess to engage and a month's music lessons for which to pay. Petroff had decreed that before Olga could benefit by his own tuition she must have two or three years' grounding under one of his pupils, a Fräulein Schnabel. Olga's nursery governess had been a subject of much discussion between Marie and Madame Mociusko. The latter had been very persistent that she and Gretchen could look after Olga while her mother was out, so that Marie need not incur unnecessary expense. Marie, however, had refused to agree to Madame's proposition. She had engaged Freda Schmitt, a cheerful and sensible girl of twenty. Freda's task was to supervise Olga's practising, give the child elementary tuition in German and English, play games with the little genius, and prevent Olga from growing into an oddity, school being out of the question for a pupil dedicated to music and for whom practising was of primary importance.

Olga's maintenance and education constituted a load almost greater than Marie could bear. It was in the hope of acquiring financial strength to support this burden that Marie reluctantly consented to undergo the ordeal of Vronsky's scrutiny.

When, as an applicant for employment, Marie entered the *New Art Theatre*, Mociusko led her to the gymnasium. Here a few girls, very lightly clad, were busy at the

parallel bars in the company of a perfectly formed lad of about seventeen. Marie recognized the youth as the impersonator of *Amor*, and was fascinated by his beauty.

"Here's Frau Stanin," whispered Mociusko. "She's our teacher of physical culture. She's Russian, but was trained in Sweden and has worked with Vronsky for years. Her husband's stage-manager, and Vronsky calls the Stanins his right and left hands. You'll like her."

As soon as he had introduced Marie to Sonia Stanin, Mociusko hurried away to his office and, as Frau Stanin bade her sit down and wait, Marie had time to observe the physical culturist. Sonia Stanin was a slim, willowy creature whose body, despite her forty-eight years, was almost as flexible as that of a flapper. She wore the same scanty attire as the girls, for Vronsky, like the sun-bathing advocates of to-day, believed that when men and women are accustomed to see each other unclothed, their baser animal instincts are subordinated and their senses unperturbed by the absence of covering in the opposite sex.

Having allotted the students their special tasks, Frau Stanin showed Marie into a large, well warmed dressing-room and bade her disrobe. "You understand that you must undress completely for the test," said Frau Stanin, "but you needn't feel shy. I'll be on the stage with you and both my husband and Herr Vronsky, who'll examine you and take your measurements, are utterly impersonal in their scrutiny. They think no more of naked girls than painters who specialize in nude studies. I'll give you the drawings of the figure you've to represent. Each candidate is allowed a quarter-of-an-hour to study them before going to the green-room. You'll see further pictures on the stage to refresh your memory."

Marie gazed eagerly at the pictures. Was there any possibility of her being able to represent this figure of a Bacchante? She heaved a sigh of relief as she noticed that there seemed nothing very difficult about the pose.

Then glancing at the sketch of the complete group that formed *The Fountain of Bacchus*, Marie saw that the Bacchante she had to impersonate was in the centre. Seated on a ledge of rock, the girl gazed upward. With her left hand she caressed the foot of Bacchus, beside which was an overturned amphora, while, in her right hand, she held a golden goblet.

When the quarter-of-an-hour had elapsed, Frau Stanin reappeared, and taking back the pictures, sent Marie to the green-room, escorted by a call-boy. Some half-dozen candidates variously attired in wrappers and coats were lounging serenely or sitting bolt upright, taut with nervousness, according to their temperaments. A long table at one side of the room was covered with theatrical and musical journals, in Russian, English, French and German—not the depressingly out-of-date publications that adorn a dentist's waiting-room—but current magazines with information about the latest developments in stagecraft and music. Marie seized a magazine and an article on Franz Liszt enabled her to forget her surroundings. While she read somebody tapped her on the shoulder, and Marie laid down the journal to find Frau Stanin beside her.

"It's your turn," said the professor, "follow me."

Gathering about her the coat of her Chinese pyjamas that had been a parting present from Esmée, Marie hastened after her guide. As she walked on to the stage with her loosened hair hanging about her like a mantle, Boris, fixing his monocle in his eye, gave a sigh of relief. The English girl was the first aspirant for the vacant Bacchante's part, whose appearance was promising. Vronsky showed Marie the same courtesy as in his office, and again she contrasted Boris and Hobbs, to the supreme disadvantage of the latter. As Vronsky, who was seated on the stage, close to the footlights, pressed a bell, a curtain rose at the side, revealing a picture of *The Fountain of Bacchus*.

"Please look at the picture carefully, and then try to copy the pose of the girl in the centre," said Frau Stanin. "Give me your pyjamas, I'll look after them."

Obediently, Marie stepped out of her baggy Chinese trousers and, as she handed them, together with the coat, to Sonia Stanin, Boris, and another man whom she took to be Stanin, the stage-manager, gazed at her attentively. Vronsky then left his seat and, approaching the dais where Marie posed, passed his hands over her body with the delicately impersonal, yet firm, touch of the physician. His voice was perfectly calm and businesslike as he remarked, "Mrs. Drayton's body is supple and her flesh isn't flabby. Should I engage her, though, she'll require plenty of exercise to strengthen the muscles of her legs, arms, and back. Her ankles, too, will need special massage to enable her to do the barefoot dancing I require."

Frau Stanin listened attentively to Vronsky the while her husband murmured Marie's measurements to his assistant, who wrote them down for Vronsky's subsequent perusal. Everything was so matter-of-fact that Marie lost her self-consciousness and felt as though she were being measured by a tailor or dressmaker.

When Vronsky and Stanin had resumed their seats, Marie, in accordance with their instructions, improvized a dance such as she imagined the Bacchante might have performed. At the corner of the dais lay a wreath of vine leaves which Marie picked up pretending to present the garland to Bacchus. Then crouching on her heels, she covered her face with her hands, as though to shade her eyes from the radiance of the deity's visage. The profile of her form in this attitude was so graceful that Vronsky decided to introduce this pose into the Bacchanalian revel he was composing.

When she returned to the dressing-room, despair blurred Marie's outlook. She had failed, of that she was convinced. She glanced at her watch. It was only

4.30 p.m. If Mociusko told her that her services would not be required at the *New Art Theatre*, as she felt sure he would, she would apply immediately for the vacant post of English teacher that she had seen advertised in the local paper that morning. Marie dressed quickly and hastened to Mociusko's office. A couple of minutes after she had sent in her name the Roumanian summoned her.

For once, Otto gave a well-needed holiday to his careworn expression and beamed with satisfaction. "I congratulate you warmly," he said. "Vronsky has this moment telephoned me to offer you an engagement in *The Fountain of Bacchus*. I was just going to send to your dressing-room to let you know, but you're too quick for me. Vronsky wants your decision at once. If you refuse his offer he'll examine the other candidates. He has suspended the audition until he has your reply."

"What's the pay?" Marie asked, endeavouring to appear business-like, although, in her delight, she was tempted to throw her arms round Mociusko's neck.

"A hundred marks a week. I wish it were more, for I know how badly you need the money, but I hope you'll accept Vronsky's offer. It's bound to lead to better terms later on."

Again Marie had the greatest difficulty to prevent herself from giving vent to any unseemly display of joy. A hundred marks a week was bigger pay than she had anticipated, and the prospect of association with Vronsky's artistry was a mental tonic. She accepted the offer unhesitatingly.

"That's fine. Wait a moment while I telephone your reply to Vronsky." As he replaced the receiver, Otto remarked, "Vronsky says you're to commence work to-morrow. You'd best be here soon after eleven so as to sign your contract and get your time-table from Frau Stanin before gymnasium begins at twelve."

The next morning, although it was only eleven-thirty by the time Marie had signed her contract, Sonia Stanin had already been at work in the gymnasium for an hour-and-a-half, and had put through their paces the performers in the *Titian Gallery* and other current items on the programme.

"I'm glad you're early," said the physical culturist as she greeted Marie, "I'll have time to show you your table and locker in the dressing-room which you'll share with the other girls of the Bacchus troupe. But first, I must introduce you to Bacchus himself. Stefan," she called.

"Coming," was the reply and the Greek boy, whose beauty had startled Marie on the previous day, stepped into the room.

"This is Stefan Ralli who takes the part of Bacchus," explained Sonia.

Stefan gave Marie a friendly smile that showed his perfect white teeth. "Welcome to *The Fountain of Bacchus*," he said, "I'll love to have you as one of my votaries."

"He's a dear boy," said Frau Stanin, when Stefan was out of earshot, "and it's fortunate for him that he's entirely lacking in sex interest where women are concerned. He's only seventeen, but has the good sense to realize that his body is his one means of making a good income, and that self-indulgence in any form would ruin his beauty and mar his health."

By this time they had reached the dressing-room, where Sonia introduced Marie to the other girls who were taking part in *The Fountain of Bacchus*. From the dressing-room Marie and her companions made their way to the gymnasium, where the Swedish drill occupied a full hour, the six girls, standing in front of Frau Stanin, copied her graceful movements, in the company of Stefan and another boy, Stefan's understudy. Marie found the exercises very exhausting and was glad when

the lock struck one and there was a short respite for lunch.

The first rehearsal of *The Fountain of Bacchus* was that same night. From midnight until four a.m. the rehearsal proceeded with brief intervals for rest and refreshment. Stefan, however, was allowed to depart at half-time, because he was the one member of the cast who, in addition to rehearsing, was appearing in the current programme.

As a result of healthy and regular physical training, massage and diet, Marie's corporal beauty increased apace, while her love of art, mental activity and quickness of perception soon singled her out from her colleagues. Vronsky soon contracted the habit of giving his instructions to Marie in person, leaving her to communicate them patiently to her duller companions. By the time the day dawned for the production of *The Fountain of Bacchus*, Marie had won a special place in the estimation of the impresario, who had bestowed upon her the stage name of Damaris.

Although the life of hard work, stern discipline and lack of sexual indulgence reminded Marie in many ways of the régime in Cynthia's home, she knew that the general public, ignorant of the sobriety and abstinence practised by the *New Art* girls, would take it for granted that Damaris, the nude dancer, was a prostitute, with morals as scanty as her drapery. For herself, Marie did not mind. Experience had taught her to despise the cruel stupidity of Mrs. Grundy, whatever the nationality of that ubiquitous female, but she determined that Olga must never know the nature of her employment lest, in after years, the child might be ashamed of her mother. Marie soon found that if she and her daughter both continued to live under Madame Mociusko's roof, it would be impossible to keep the clever little girl in ignorance. In Olga's presence, Madame Mociusko frequently plied Marie with questions about rehearsals,

while the child began to show curiosity about her mother's unwonted absences at night. At the end of her first week's work, therefore, Marie moved to quarters recommended by Sonia Stanin. At first, Madame Mociusko was peeved at Marie's removal, but the thought that she would be able to rule supreme over Olga, and dictate to Freda how the child should be brought up, soon consoled the kind-hearted Jewess, who was as devoted to the embryo pianist as though the young pianist were her own grandchild.

When planning the programme in which *The Fountain of Bacchus* was to feature as star turn, Vronsky retained in the first part the *Titian Gallery* and *Amor and Psyche*, for the Grand Duke wished to see these items again. To make the performance of the requisite length, one hour-and-a-quarter for Part I, and one hour for Part II, Boris selected another new item, a fantastic setting of the *Underworld* in Gluck's *Orpheus*, with Lola Scheidermann, a mezzo-soprano, in the title rôle. Her singing thrilled the packed house, while every pair of opera glasses was raised when the wonderful dances of the Furies and the Happy Shades were in progress. Their seductive forms and alluring curves suggested that a Hades peopled with such radiant bodies of aphrodisiac charm, would be far more attractive than any paradise of bloodless angels.

Though Grafburg theatre-goers, like all good Germans, enjoyed snacks at the numerous bars, without which no Teutonic theatre is complete, they had all finished their sausages, *Sauerkraut*,¹ *Schnitzel*,² and beer before the first warning bell reminded them that *The Fountain of Bacchus* was about to be revealed. The programmatic description of this turn was cryptic, and gave a final polish to the sharp edge of curiosity whetted by numerous rumours and counter-rumours. The only information vouchsafed was that the scene would be laid in the house

¹ Pickled cabbage.

² Cutlets.

of Glaucus, the Athenian, described by Bulwer Lytton in *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

When the curtains of gold plush parted, the audience had still to exercise further patience, for these hangings revealed others, of reddish-purple hue. Eventually, these rose too and framed the stage, set as the hall or *atrium* of the villa of Glaucus in Pompeii. In the centre was the *impluvium*, or reservoir for rain-water, from which rose an exquisitely chiselled marble group of Bacchus, the beautiful youth, encircled by six naked female votaries. The walls glowed with painted representations of the parting of Achilles and Briseis, as described by Bulwer Lytton, and on the left side of the stage was a table flanked with jewelled couches draped with Oriental rugs.

Forgetting the prohibition of applause except during intervals, forgetting the presence of the Grand Duke in the royal box, men and women alike started to clap at the appearance of Bittich, the clean-limbed young athlete, who took the part of Glaucus. He wore a purple tunic that blended in colour with hangings and rugs, and was fastened with emerald buckles which sparkled as he walked across the stage to greet his guests. These were Clodius, the Roman, *who wore his tunic in those loose and effeminate folds which proved him to be a gentleman and a coxcomb*;¹ the twenty-four year old Sallust, *who had no pleasure in life like eating*,¹ and the self-satisfied old bounder, Pansa the aedile.¹ Glaucus drew the attention of his friends to *The Fountain of Bacchus*, which the visitors praised enthusiastically. The owner explained that this work of art had but recently arrived from Greece, and was the creation of a genius whose untimely death had deprived the world of a second Praxiteles. Then, as the slaves placed cups of wine on the table, Glaucus offered up prayers to the image of Bacchus, and both he and his friends performed libation

¹ *The Last Days of Pompeii*, by Bulwer Lytton.

in honour of the great god of wine. When the banquet was at an end, musicians clad in Greek costume lulled the diners to sleep with the following drinking song :

“ Fill up, fill up, to the sparkling brim,
The juice of the young Lyaeus ;
The grape is the key that we owe to him,
From the gaol of the world to free us.
Drink ! Drink !
What need to shrink,
When the lamps alone can see us ? ”¹

During the final pianissimo repetition of this chorus, the lights were extinguished, and the stage revolved in the darkness. In the next tableau the sleepers were in the distant background, the frescoed walls had receded, and the foreground was occupied by a living replica of *The Fountain of Bacchus*.

The sub-title of this scene was *The Dream of Glaucus*, and in it Stefan, as Bacchus, facing the audience, stood aloft on a rock, which was encircled round the base by a garland of girls, of whom the most beautiful was Marie, the central figure. Above his head Bacchus held a golden loving-cup at which he gazed in adoration. Boris had selected this attitude so that every detail of the Greek's lovely body should be visible to the audience, and had selected the posture of the girls with equal care. To afford views of these human statues at every angle the fountain slowly revolved. When it came to a standstill the girls descended and began to dance, by their gestures inviting Bacchus to join in their frolic. For a few moments Stefan thoroughly enjoyed the additional importance which his figure acquired, as he stood alone on the rock that formed the body of the fountain. Then the deity deigned to accede to the solicitations of his votaries, and during the revel which ensued each girl appeared to vie with her sisters for the privilege of embracing the god.

¹ *The Last Days of Pompeii*, by Bulwer Lytton.

“ Since Life’s so short, we’ll live to laugh ;
Ah ! wherefore waste a minute !
If youth’s the cup we yet can quaff,
Be love the pearl within it ! ”¹

To these pagan strains each girl in turn tried to wrest the loving-cup from the hands of Stefan, who showed an ardour which he had never evinced at rehearsals. The knowledge that he was carrying his audience with him ; that he could play at will on the emotions of the spectators ; that, for the moment, he was dictator of their thoughts, controller of their enthusiasms ; that they would believe what he wanted them to believe, that they would feel what he wanted them to feel, inspired Stefan, and he infected Marie, as sensitive as he, with his enthusiasm. His imagination was stirred. For one short moment, Stefan believed that he actually was possessed of godhead and that he was not in the *New Art Theatre*, but gambolling on the Islands of the Blest.

“ Drink ! Drink !
What need to shrink,
When the lamps alone can see us ? ”

It was with infinite regret that Stefan heard this musical cue to return to his original position, for it warned him that the supreme moment of his triumph was about to terminate. Both he and Marie wore ecstatic expressions, as the human statues remained motionless before darkness enveloped them.

Again Glaucus and his friends recumbent on their easeful couches occupied the front of the stage. Again the marble fountain decorated the *impluvium*. The Athenian stirred, rubbed his eyes and stretched out his arms yearningly towards the Bacchantes adorning the ornament. “ So it was only a dream that my fountain came to life,” he said wistfully. “ Ah, well ! I thank the gods for affording me this one short glimpse of the celestial regions.”

¹ *The Last Days of Pompeii*, by Bulwer Lytton.

Boris realized that *The Fountain of Bacchus* was the greatest success of his career. Bacchus and his votaries had to resume their poses no less than seven times before the curtain finally descended, and even then the audience clamoured for yet another vision.

In obedience to the Grand Duke's commands, Vronsky hurried to the royal box. The ruler was enthusiastic over the production and expressed his particular admiration for Stefan and Marie. He asked for details respecting Damaris, whose personality, so the Duke maintained, distinguished her from her companions. Boris told what he knew, which was indeed very little beyond the fact that Damaris was the daughter of Paul Drayton, the composer. This information further stimulated the interest of the potentate.

"I remember Paul Drayton," the Duke said. "I was abroad when he died, otherwise, to show my appreciation of her husband's work, I'd have tried to assist Mrs. Drayton. I'm glad to think that I can now pay homage to Drayton's genius by interesting myself in the daughter. Send for her, Vronsky."

At once, in the estimation of the impresario, Marie's potential value had increased. Vronsky considered that affairs had taken an unexpectedly favourable turn, for he would take care that the ruler's interest in Damaris should benefit himself. While watching Marie accept an invitation to a ducal supper party, Boris determined to induce her to sign immediately a three years' contract with commencing pay of a hundred and fifty marks a week. Then, should he leave Grafburg at the expiry of his lease he would be protected. Damaris would be compelled to remain with the *New Art Company* unless, having become the ruler's favourite, she persuaded her protector to pay heavy compensation for her breach of contract.

Marie signed the contract without demur. She thanked Boris, when he warned her of the instability of

royal favour, and advised her to accept whatever gifts her royal patron might choose to bestow upon her while giving in return as little as possible of herself, and least of all her heart. Vronsky little guessed that it was on account of her mother love that Damaris consented to play her employer's game.

CHAPTER X

THE PROPHET'S MANTLE

ONE afternoon, early in December 1913, Olga rushed into Madame Mociusko's room, and threw her arms round Madame's neck. "Grannie, darling, isn't it wonderful?"

"What's wonderful, pet?"

"Why, *Maestro* says I'm to play at his pupils' Christmas concert. You know he only selects his most advanced students for this show, and what do you think I'm to play?" Olga punctuated her remarks with a further hug. "Guess!"

"I couldn't. You know so many pieces that my poor head can't remember the names of half of them. I expect, though, that it's something by Liszt, for though I don't understand a very great deal about piano playing, it always seems to me that you play Liszt's music better than anyone else's."

"Well, your guess is partly right. *Maestro* says I'm to play the *Second Hungarian Rhapsody* as my solo, you know the one, it's mummy's favourite. But I'm almost more delighted that I'm to play *Maestro's* new *concerto* for piano and orchestra. I do love it so, it makes me feel I never want to be naughty any more." Olga hummed the principal subject of the finale, which Petroff himself described as his appeal to destiny.

Olga was sturdy and well grown and, although not quite thirteen, looked older than she was. Her hair had changed from the gold of babyhood to the colour of ripe corn, that emphasized the deep violet of her eyes, in which blended grey and brown hues inherited, respectively, from father and mother. "I wish Mummy

could be here for the concert. Do you think there's any use in my writing and asking her to come?"

"See what she said in her last letter," Madame Mociusko replied. "I know she mentioned that she'd be visiting us soon."

During the years that had elapsed since the production of *The Fountain of Bacchus*, Marie had been touring almost incessantly with the Vronsky Company. At the conclusion of his lease of the *New Art Theatre* at Grafburg, Boris had presented his particular form of entertainment in nearly every country of Europe, except England. In many cities, of course, he had been obliged to modify the daring of his productions by introducing sufficient drapery to bring them within the pale of local censors. Vronsky, however, had never lacked bookings and, therefore, had made no attempt to clothe his artistes sufficiently to make their appearance possible in the British Isles.

Owing to her absence from Grafburg since 1907, absence broken only by sparse flying visits to see Olga and ascertain the child's musical progress, Marie had succeeded in keeping her daughter in ignorance of Damaris, the nude dancer. Olga answered her mother's letters regularly, but never knew her mother's address. She handed her replies to Otto Mociusko who dispatched them direct to the theatre at which the *New Art Company* happened to be performing, for Marie could not brook the delay caused by the forwarding of correspondence through agents.

"Mummy says she'll probably be here next week. I do hope she'll stay over the concert," said Olga wistfully, consulting Marie's letter.

"I'm sure she'll stay if she can manage it. But you know how busy she always is, travelling to buy art treasures for the big American firm for which she works." This was the excuse for her incessant journeys that Marie had invented to allay Olga's curiosity.

To please Olga, Madame Mociusko wrote the same night to Marie, then in Nice, to inform her of the little girl's wish. The reply was a telegram, announcing Marie's arrival in Grafburg two days later. Olga was wildly excited at the news. Although she rarely saw her mother, the child was devoted to her, and regarded her as the one person in the world to whom she could confide all her thoughts. Next to Marie, Petroff was the most understanding person in Olga's life, but the little girl was always in awe of the great virtuoso, and dared not unburden her sensitive soul to him as freely as to her parent.

Otto was almost as delighted as Olga at the prospect of Marie's visit. Damaris had acquired for him the glamour of unfamiliarity, for Madame Mociusko being too poor and nervy to be left alone, Otto had been obliged to refuse Boris's offer of employment as touring manager, and had remained at Grafburg with Vronsky's successor.

Marie was due to arrive about nine p.m., but owing to a heavy fall of snow, the express in which she travelled was nearly two hours late. Olga, who had insisted upon reaching the station long before the scheduled hour of arrival, refused to budge. She was terrified that if she went home to return later, by some mysterious means her mother might arrive during her absence. Moreover, the railway station, with trains bound for different lands, fascinated the imaginative child. She fancied herself on concert tours in those trains, as she gazed at the indicator announcing the hours of departure for Breslau and Warsaw; for Pressburg and Budapest; for Dresden and Frankfurt. The mystery of the engines approaching out of the darkness thrilled her. The steam from the heating apparatus that enveloped the platform in mist reminded her of the magic smoke, when Brünnhilde is put to sleep by Loge, the fire god, at the close of Wagner's *Valkyrie*. The rallentando revolutions

of the engine wheels preparatory to halting, their *accelerando* as they departed, drawing the trains that resembled illuminated serpents, inspired Olga. While she sat with Freda Schmitt, in the cosy refreshment room, she jotted down the theme of a fantasy that she determined to show to Petroff, who was always interested in her compositions.

Owing to her musical precocity, Olga had soon become capable of practising alone, but Freda had continued to attend to the child's general education. Since Olga's tenth birthday, this had included English lessons from Miss Brown, a retired English schoolmistress, for Marie was anxious that Olga should have thorough knowledge of her native language, and become a concrete denial of the asseveration that Britain cannot produce musicians.

When Marie eventually arrived, Olga was beside herself with pride that this beautiful, elegant, sumptuously clad lady was her mother. The two clasped each other in a long embrace while, to hide her emotion, Freda bustled unnecessarily over the luggage. After escorting Marie and Olga to a taxi, the governess proposed to return by tram to her own home, but Marie would not hear of such a thing.

"You're as much one of my family as Grannie Mociusko and Uncle Otto, and our gathering to-night wouldn't be complete without you," said Marie to Freda. "Don't argue, my dear, but get into the taxi."

By the time that Marie and her companions reached his mother's flat, Otto had returned from the theatre, and a merry party ensued. About one a.m. the company adjourned to Olga's den. Madame's special liqueurs, manufactured according to secret hereditary recipes, were placed on the table, and the Bohemian glass decanters encircled by stumpy, miniature tumblers reminded Marie of her father's parties, on the red-letter days when his credit had been good enough for him to gratify his hospitable tastes.

THE PROPHET'S MANTLE

"Mummy hasn't seen my new piano yet," said Olga with pride, opening a Blüthner grand, which Marie had given her on her twelfth birthday, and which Petroff himself had chosen for his pet pupil.

"No, darling. You remember I explained to you in my letter how sorry I was that on your birthday I had to be in Moscow on business."

"Well, now, Mummy, I'm going to play my thanks to you," and Olga threw her arms round her mother's neck.

Despite the lateness of the hour, the grown-ups had not the heart to forbid the child the supreme joy of playing to her mother. To Marie and to Petroff, Olga played better than to anyone else, for between the performer and these two listeners was a bond of sympathy far more effectively interpreted through the magic tones of music, than through the inadequate medium of the spoken word.

Freda told Marie that Petroff had decreed that the day already begun was to be a holiday for the little girl on which she was neither to practise nor compose. Thus quieted, Marie lay back and gave herself up to the full enjoyment of the marvellous performance. As Olga played in the semi-darkened room, illuminated only by one of Petroff's specially designed piano lamps, the child's face was etherealized, as though she were in communication with the spirits of the great masters and inspired by their guidance. She performed by heart several of Marie's favourites, including Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique*, and concluded with the *Marche Militaire* of Schubert-Tausig, the stirring rhythm of which chased away the tears of delight that had welled into Marie's eyes during the course of the impromptu recital. Gratitude to her Creator filled Marie's being. She felt exalted above other women that she had been privileged to give birth to a pianist who promised to become one of the greatest concert artistes of her time. Olga's playing more than compensated Marie for all past

sufferings, all sacrifices, all hard work and, in listening to it, she was almost terrified of her joy, fearing lest a jealous fate should punish her for her pride by preventing the fulfilment of her hopes.

The following afternoon Marie received a reply from Petroff to a letter she had sent the *maestro*. Petroff addressed Marie as the "mother of his adopted granddaughter," and asked her to call on him that same day.

The leonine head was a trifle more hoary than on the day, seven years before, when Marie had first led Olga into Petroff's studio. But there was new tenderness in the face that had been so harrowed by grief. When Marie told the virtuoso that he looked well his countenance lighted up with a wonderful smile.

"If I look better," he said, "it's thanks to your little girl. She's my joy and my comfort. She has consoled me for the loss of my grand-daughter and from henceforth, with your permission, she shall be called Petrovka, the professional name my son's daughter would have borne, had God willed her to live."

Marie threw her arms round Petroff's neck and kissed him on both cheeks at which the musician beamed with happiness. "I accept with joy your proposal to call Olga Petrovka," she said. "I hope she'll prove worthy of the Prophet's mantle, but that many many years will elapse before you discard it."

Petroff informed Marie that the Director of the Grafburg Symphony Concerts had promised to attend the Christmas concert, at which Olga was to play the *maestro's* pianoforte *concerto*. The Director had already half promised to engage Olga for a Symphony Concert, at which, the following autumn, she would make her professional *début* as Petrovka. Marie was enchanted. Petroff added that he had spoken to the Grand Duke of Olga's genius, and that the monarch had expressed a wish to hear the child perform. If the ruler agreed to be present at Petrovka's first public

appearance, the Director would book her forthwith for the following winter season. The papers would insert preliminary paragraphs about Petrovka's pianistic prowess, and the public would be keenly interested in the forthcoming event. The virtuoso added that he would try to arrange for Olga to play to the Duke on the morrow, the last day of Marie's visit to Grafburg, for the ruler's interest in Olga would increase if Marie herself introduced her daughter.

Before Marie took leave, Petroff lowered his voice, fearful of being overheard. "You may wonder why I've decided that Olga's to play my new *concerto* instead of a classic at the Christmas concert. Well, I'll confess to you privately that the idea of Olga, in the *concerto*, appealing to destiny, pleases me. You may call me fantastic, superstitious if you will, but I've a feeling that when she beseeches destiny in terms of music—my music—her prayer will be heard. Success will attend her so long as she remains faithful to her art. I'm endeavouring to inculcate in Olga's brain the idea that with her music must always take precedence over every other interest."

"I think it'd kill me if Olga were to deviate one hair's breadth from the career to which you, *Maestro*, dedicated her."

The following day, the Duke received Marie and Olga very graciously, and, in accordance with Marie's wish, mentioned to him previously by Petroff, the ruler made no allusion to Vronsky or Damaris in Olga's presence. Although, years before, Marie had charmed the Duke by her beauty and gentleness, and he had endeavoured to stir her into reciprocating his passion, Marie had never yielded to his solicitations to become his mistress. Irritated by her refusal, the Duke had raised no objections when, according to the terms of her contract, Marie had left Grafburg with Vronsky. During the period that had intervened, the Duke's annoyance

had subsided. His experiences with mercenary mistresses, whose financial demands had diminished the contents of his privy purse, caused him to remember appreciatively Marie's refinement and intelligence. After hearing Olga play, he consented unconditionally to be present at Petrovka's professional birth. Moreover, he declared that he would nominate her *Hofpianistin*.¹ Securing her a modest but regular salary, this honour would afford Petrovka ample leisure to tour as Grafburg court pianist and earn laurels for herself, while reflecting glory on the home of her adoption.

After thanking Olga for the pleasure she had given him, the Duke kissed the young artiste and presented her with one hundred marks, telling her playfully that there were many more in store for her. Overcome with amazement at the thought of being able to buy a gift for her mother with money she had earned, Olga bungled over the curtsy that Freda had made her practise for half-an-hour, before going to the palace. She was then whisked away by the Duke's private secretary, who had orders to entertain her until the monarch had terminated his interview with her mother. Before Marie departed, the Duke expressed the hope that she would return permanently to Grafburg, and invited her to be his guest in the royal box on the momentous occasion of Petrovka's first appearance at the symphony concerts.

The next day, Marie left Grafburg and bade Olga *au revoir* more light-heartedly than at any previous parting. It seemed to her that, at last, she had successfully scaled the mountain of uncertainty beneath whose shadow she had travelled ever since Longford's abandonment. She felt that she had reached a plateau upon which she could continue her journey, via a well-tarred road, devoid of the boulders of doubt that, despite her artistic triumphs, had often made the game of life seem scarcely worth the candle.

¹ Court Pianist.

In March 1914, in Madrid, where the *New Art Company* had played nightly to crowded houses, Marie received her first intimation of possible landslides ahead. Pending the completion of arrangements for a new tour, Boris had given Marie leave to take a short trip to Grafburg. On the day prior to her departure, Marie and the Stanins, as was their custom, were busy in Vronsky's private room, dealing with confidential papers.

Suddenly their chief entered, with two open cablegrams. "Congratulate me," he said. "I've realized my ambition. The Company's booked for a long American tour. These cables are from my New York representative informing me that he's arranging sailings for us next week. I'm circulating notices that all leave's cancelled."

Marie's heart sank. Boris's news shattered the prospect of her excursion to Grafburg. She concealed her disappointment as best she could, for Vronsky had been a good friend to her, and a generous employer. She resolved, however, that when Petrovka was launched the following autumn at the Grafburg Symphony Concerts, she would comply with the wishes of the Grand Duke, and make her headquarters in his capital, so as to devote herself to the furtherance of her daughter's interests. Meanwhile, she tried to console herself with the thought that her increased salary on the United States tour would mean substantial additions to her savings, so laboriously accumulated for Olga's benefit.

Throughout her travels with the *New Art Company*, Marie had kept a diary. This journal, however, contained no mention of the triumphs of Damaris the dancer. Marie's literary efforts were confined to remarks on the cost of living, and of travelling in the many European lands she had visited, with supplementary information about musical taste and concert agencies. She reflected that she would be able to complete this book of reference, compiled for Olga's use, by notes on

the United States of America, Canada, and probably South America. She forced herself to believe that the knowledge she would acquire would be of great service to her when, in the capacity of manager and chaperone, she would accompany the young pianist on concert tours. In spite of these arguments, Marie felt a gloom steal over her as she boarded the liner at Cherbourg such as she had never experienced when starting for some distant country in Europe.

From the start, the American tour was a complete success, and gave promise of considerable additions to Marie's banking account. But she was much perturbed by a letter from Petroff that reached her at the end of July. In it, the virtuoso mentioned the sudden death of the Grand Duke, and his successor's hatred of foreigners. Petroff feared for the ratification of Olga's appointment as court pianist, and for her début at the Grafburg Symphony Concerts, unless Marie agreed that she and Olga would become naturalized Germans.

Then came the shock of the Great War.

In her distress Marie would have set out for Grafburg had not Boris convinced her that, being an enemy alien, she would not be allowed to land on German soil, and stood a better chance of receiving news of Olga by remaining in America, then a neutral country, than by going to England.

Vronsky was no patriot and decided not to abandon his American tour, but to keep his company in the Western World until the conflict was over, for he expected it would be of short duration. After receiving from Otto a censored letter, informing her that Olga was well and still in his mother's care, Marie elected to remain with the *New Art Company*. Mociusko stated that, although over military age, Petroff, being Russian, had been interned. Otto added that he had been lucky enough to secure, through influence, a post in a munition factory, while his mother worked as a hospital cook, and

Olga had unpaid employment in a clothing depot. These occupations afforded his household the preferential treatment, accorded to national service workers by the Grafburg authorities, and enabled him and his mother to retain possession of their flat.

It cut Marie's heart to the quick to think of Olga's supple, pianistic fingers being coarsened by the handling of rough materials and stiffened by lack of practice. Nevertheless she was so relieved to know of her daughter's safety that, after the receipt of Mociusko's missive, the anxiety that was devastating the countenance of Damaris abated. Marie made up her mind to live for the day when she and Olga would be reunited—never more to part.

CHAPTER XI

WAR

THE sufferings wrought by the War played havoc with the health and spirits of the Mociuskos. Their strength was undermined by makeshift food, bread tasting of sawdust, so-called mutton that was dog, while their worn-out clothing afforded them but little protection from the bitter cold.

Olga bore a close resemblance to Marie and promised to become a very beautiful woman, provided hardships neither coarsened her skin nor sharpened her features. At the outbreak of War, her general education terminated abruptly, for Freda took a post to release a man for the front, while Miss Brown, who was in England, did not return to Grafburg. The anxiety about her mother caused Olga to develop prematurely, and she was acutely sensitive about living on the Mociuskos' charity, owing to the failure of Marie's remittances to reach their destination. After the outbreak of War, Marie continued to make her monthly payments to Madame Mociusko through the post, but when she received no acknowledgments she feared that the money had gone astray, and, acting on Vronsky's advice, she interviewed the Roumanian Consul in New York. This official undertook to send money and letters to his colleague in Grafburg. Marie imagined that the Mociuskos received her communications, and was unaware that her remittances were misappropriated by dishonest clerks in the Roumanian Consulate in Grafburg.

Olga felt that the death of Petroff in an internment camp dried the source of energy from which her artistic battery was charged, and that she was no longer a genius,

but a very ordinary middle-class girl, whose attempts at war-time needlework and domestic tasks were painfully unsatisfactory. She was too young to obtain paid employment at the outbreak of hostilities, and the fact that, in addition to attending a clothing depot, Olga insisted upon doing the Mociuskos' housework and cooking, weighed with the authorities. Otto represented to them that, although British by birth, Olga had not a single friend or relation in England to whom she could be sent. If she were removed from his mother's home, Madame Mociusko would be compelled to relinquish her work at the hospital and undertake the duties performed by the harmless English girl, who had spent the greater part of her short life in Germany. Olga, therefore, was permitted to remain in Grafburg. As Gretchen obtained paid war work, and became a lodger of the Mociuskos, instead of being their servant, the Roumanian ménage was but little altered, except for the change in the occupation of its members, a change that made Olga a household drudge. When she entreated Otto to find a purchaser for her grand piano and retain the money it fetched, no protest was raised. Not that the Mociuskos were unsympathetic, nor grudged Olga her keep. They were simply too exhausted by their own work and financial worries to have energy to concern themselves with other people's troubles. The price paid for Olga's piano and for all the articles of furniture of which they could dispose, eased their monetary straits. At the time, Olga scarcely regretted the loss of the instrument she had formerly loved so passionately. Standing there day by day, unopened, it had reproached her mutely for not practising, a duty she had abandoned owing to her domestic tasks and war work, which left her neither time nor strength for anything else.

By August 1916, Olga's mental suffering had been dulled by physical discomfort. She never had enough to eat, and food, to which, formerly, she had paid but

little attention, began to occupy an important place in her thoughts. The preparation of meals, the search after recipes for making repugnant rations tasty, occupied a large portion of her day. She envied the girls old enough to have sweethearts at the front, because of their excitement when their lovers had leave, and the tragedy-queen interest they evoked if their young men were killed. She longed to be of an age to become a nursing-sister, a chauffeuse, a clerk—anything, in fact, that would enable her to escape the hideous drabness of her monotonous, squalid existence. Olga's memories of life in Grafburg during the War were to be for ever associated with stiffened fingers, chilblained in winter, and nails that were always dirty. Often at night when she crept weary to bed, she shed tears over her hands, which Petroff had prized so highly, and which now resembled those of a charwoman rather than of a pianist.

Olga's devotion to the Mociuskos never flagged, and she was far more distressed about Grannie Mociusko's aches and pains than about her own. When, on August 28, 1916, Otto returned at an unusual hour from the munition factory to announce that, as Germany had declared war on Roumania, he was to be interned, Olga thought her heart would break. It was she who fetched Madame Mociusko from the hospital, she who informed the terrified woman of the impending tragedy and the young girl would willingly have lain down and died, if, thereby, she could have spared the Mociuskos their pathetic separation.

Madame Mociusko had suffered from heart trouble for years, and once or twice before the War had had attacks of *angina pectoris*. She crumpled up after Otto's internment, and the night after his removal into camp she was the victim of another attack, far more acute than any previous one. Further attacks followed at ever shorter intervals, and, as Gretchen worked alternately on day and night shifts, the duties of sick nurse devolved

almost entirely upon Olga. Night after night the young girl was roused by the dry, hacking cough that preluded a heart seizure, and she scarce dared leave the invalid, even to do the necessary meagre scraps of shopping lest, during her absence, Madame Mociusko should die unattended. Gretchen longed to relinquish her war work, so as to relieve Olga of cares far too heavy for a child's shoulders, but the household now depended solely on her earnings, for Otto had invested all his savings in Roumanian petroleum shares, and not a single dividend reached Grafburg after the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Roumania. Anxiety caused Olga to lose her craving for food. She no longer experienced the sharp pangs of hunger that had previously plagued her. She was thankful for this respite, but soon found shooting pains in the head, and a craving for sleep almost more distressing. Owing to lack of nourishment, Olga had little strength to resist the cold of 1916, and Gretchen began to fear that the child would not survive the winter, for Olga's health was yet farther undermined by constant fretting about her mother, from whom she had received no communication since the end of 1914.

Suddenly, Madame seemed to regain vigour, and she commenced to relieve Olga of some of the domestic drudgery. On Olga's sixteenth birthday, January 2, 1917, Madame Mociusko tottered to a cupboard and, after much fumbling with keys and refusals of assistance, produced a small bottle of liqueur of her own making, which she placed triumphantly on the kitchen table.

"There's no need to lock the cupboard again," she remarked, "this is the last bottle, but, please God, as soon as the War's over, I'll brew some more, to celebrate Otto's return."

Olga and Gretchen eyed each other in amazement. It was the first time since 1914 that Madame Mociusko had evinced the slightest hopefulness.

"I've been thinking," Madame continued, as she poured herself out a second glass of liqueur "that it'd be advisable for Olga, now that I'm so much better and that she's sixteen, to take a paid job. I'm sure she could get one easily if she became a naturalized German, and I believe that could be arranged through our old solicitor, Dr. Schacht, who has known Olga since she was a tiny child, and has always been most interested in her career." Madame then addressed herself more particularly to Olga. "I'm certain your mother would approve of your naturalization, and if you were to earn money and get about a bit, you'd be more cheerful. Staying in the flat all day, looking after an old woman, is bad for a young girl."

Olga glanced inquiringly at Gretchen. "I don't mind a bit what I do to help you, Grannie dear, If you think I can become a naturalized German and that it'll be of assistance, of course I'll agree. I must use my own judgment, now that I've no mother to consult."

"Come, come, child, don't be so cast down. I feel convinced your mother's alive and that, as soon as this cursed War's over she'll return, and be overjoyed to find that you've helped yourself and me by becoming a German subject. I'm going to drink another glass to your reunion with your mother and to my reunion with Otto."

Both her companions tried to stop Madame Mociusko from taking any more alcohol. "Darling Grannie, you know the doctor said you oughtn't to take any stimulant on account of your heart," said Olga imploringly.

"I don't believe he understands anything at all about my case," said Madame. "Anyway, nobody shall stop me from drinking my own liqueur when I've the chance." So saying, she obstinately drained her glass.

By this time the bottle was empty, and declaring that she felt better than she had for years, Madame went to bed immediately after supper.

About two a.m. she awoke complaining of breathlessness. Olga, who slept in her room, rushed for nitrite of amyl, but the drug failed to give the accustomed relief. There was nothing for it but to call Gretchen, though Olga hated to disturb the weary war worker. Together, the two friends shifted Madame into a sitting position, but this brought no comfort to the sufferer, and after a protracted struggle for life Madame Mociusko breathed her last.

Olga and Gretchen were the only mourners at Madame Mociusko's pauper funeral. When it was over, Gretchen tackled the problem of Olga's future. With Olga's assistance she searched amongst Madame's effects for Marie's address, but without success. They did not know that on the day of his internment, during his short period of liberty, between leaving the munition factory and being taken to the internment camp—liberty he had obtained through influence—Otto had made a holocaust of all Marie's letters, lest the flat should be searched, and his mother be arrested on the charge of corresponding with an enemy alien.

Gretchen next wrote a letter to her sister Martha in Tannenkop, her Bohemian home town, and described Madame Mociusko's death.

In reply, Martha suggested that Gretchen should return home, so as to renew friendship with Georg Kreismann, a former admirer. Georg was recovering from the amputation of a leg, and Martha hinted that, whereas two-legged and active, Georg had failed to be ensnared into matrimony, bed-ridden, craving for sympathy, and in need of someone to look after him permanently, Georg would more easily fall a victim to Gretchen's charms. Moreover she suggested that Gretchen, now on the wrong side of thirty, in a world where the supply of men was daily diminishing, might account herself lucky if she secured a husband at all—let alone one, who, although short of a limb, was an

only child and heir to an inn, that before the War had been a very paying concern.

Gretchen discussed Martha's letter with Olga. Remembering Madame Mociusko's advice, Gretchen suggested that Olga should become a naturalized German and accompany her to Tannenkop. Olga acquiesced. There was nothing else she could do, unless she elected to remain in Grafburg and starve. Olga's chief fear was that her mother might not be able to trace her if she moved. However, Dr. Schacht, Madame Mociusko's solicitor, who undertook to arrange Olga's naturalization, promised that all letters from Marie, Olga's only correspondent, should be forwarded to Fraulein Petermann, the new name he proposed for Olga, because, though thoroughly German, it had a certain suggestion of Petrovka.

Gretchen, therefore, informed her sister that she would be accompanied on her journey to Tannenkop by Olga Petermann, a young German orphan whom she wished to befriend. When Martha wrote that there was a vacant post as hospital kitchen-maid, which Olga Petermann could fill, Gretchen decided to leave Grafburg as soon as Olga's naturalization papers were in order. While preparing Olga for her new life Gretchen gave the girl some sound advice about the use of contraceptives, and the importance of sex hygiene. Olga took an intelligent, but detached interest in the subject. To become celebrated as Petrovka—that was her life's goal, and no ideal lover figured in her projects for the future. Her art and her mother, these two indissolubly bound together, were the sole constituents of her day-dreams. She agreed with Gretchen as to the advisability of preserving the secret of her English parentage from everybody she might meet in Tannenkop, unless circumstances arose which might necessitate its revelation.

Olga found life in Tannenkop several degrees less depressing than her existence in Grafburg since the

outbreak of War. New acquaintances, fresh tasks, companions of her own age, regular hours on and off duty, all helped to cheer her. Furthermore, Gretchen, and especially Martha, contributed to Olga's emancipation by consulting her, as though her opinion were worth having, instead of treating her as a child as Madame Mociusko had done. In her spare moments Olga was allowed to practise on a piano belonging to the head doctor, who believed in the value of music in the treatment of nervous diseases. He induced Olga to play to his patients and, to enable her to do so, soon relieved her of many chores. Occasionally, she accepted invitations to visit neighbouring hospitals, where she performed to audiences larger than those at Tannenkop, and the appreciation which her playing evoked rekindled her artistic ambition, almost extinguished by the War. At seventeen, Olga was very attractive, and a general favourite, for adversity had counteracted the petting she had experienced in her childhood and had made her patient and resourceful.

In January 1919, Gretchen became the wife of Georg Kreismann, whose father had died a few months earlier. Although, always accustomed to hard work, in the early days of her marriage Gretchen nearly collapsed, owing to the heavy labour involved in putting to rights the inn which had been used as a recruiting depot. Georg did what he could to relieve his wife, but owing to his artificial limb, he was sadly handicapped and, becoming impatient, attributed the delays to his wife's incompetence, instead of to lack of money.

Gretchen's unhappiness worried Olga. Moreover Olga's own precarious position debarred her from assisting her old friend, for, pending the completion of the inn, at which she was to be resident entertainer, Olga had been compelled to accept an ill-paid post at a local cinema. Olga hoped that employment at the inn would be only temporary, and that rapid world recovery

would enable her to fulfil her aim of becoming a great pianist. It was useless for her, however, to turn her attention Grafburgwards, despite her naturalization, for the Grand Duke, the successor to her mother's patron, had lost his throne. Dr. Schacht was dead, and her efforts to communicate with Otto after the termination of hostilities elicited an official notification that Mociusko had not long survived his mother. There was not a single link left in the chain of friends that had bound Olga to Grafburg, and in mental privacy she began to search for another starting-place for Petrovka's solo flight to fame.

Amongst the music lovers who attended the cinema for the express purpose of enjoying Olga's playing, was a delicate young man, named Ludwig Bayl, who was making a prolonged visit to Tannenkop, in the hope that his weak lungs would derive benefit from the pine-scented air. Ludwig had taken violin lessons with a leading professor, and, on the few occasions when Olga had prevailed upon him to play to her, she had been struck by his depth of feeling, despite his flabby technique.

One evening when Ludwig and Olga were having supper together in a *Bierhalle*, he lamented the lack of any hotel or inn in Tannenkop.

"But one's being built now," Olga remarked.

"Really, but when will it be ready? I'm sure anybody with enterprise and energy'd make a fortune out of a decently run hotel. Business people from Prague'd come here for week-ends, and leave their families for the whole summer."

"Well, there'll really be a good inn one of these days," Olga persisted. "I know all about it, for I'm to be entertainer, and hope to arrange really first-class concerts that'll be a draw."

"How soon is this alleged inn of yours to be opened?"

Ludwig listened intently, as in reply Olga described the financial difficulties against which Georg and Gretchen

were contending. He often reverted to the subject of the inn. The outcome of these conversations between Ludwig and Olga, in which Gretchen and her husband subsequently took part, was a visit of Bayl Senior, a vulgar, but alert business man, who had amassed a fortune during his country's agony by dealing in metal and other war commodities. As a speculation, Ludwig's father agreed to purchase the inn, furnish the capital for its speedy completion, and engage Georg and Gretchen to run it, under the direction of his son, who was to live there as manager. Bayl Senior was favourably disposed towards Olga who, he felt sure, was the cause of his son's eagerness to make good at business. When Ludwig proposed to visit Prague to select a piano for the inn, his parents invited Olga to accompany him.

Prague fascinated Olga. The mediæval market-place with its famous clock, the cathedral commenced a thousand years ago, the ghetto, the old synagogue, all appealed to Olga's love of romance so battered by the grim ugliness of war. On the afternoon before they left Prague, Ludwig took Olga to one of the dark serpentine streets in which the city abounds, and led her into one of the quaintest houses she had ever seen. He explained that on the second floor resided a noted garnet merchant, and that he had arranged for the old man, a personal friend of the Bayls, to display to Olga some of his finest stones. In his skull cap, with his white beard, the dealer resembled the picture on the panelled wall of the alchemist who, in the sixteenth century, had professed to manufacture gold in the very room in which the garnets were displayed. Olga was at once enamoured of the deep wine-coloured gems, admiring, especially, an old-fashioned marquise ring, an heirloom belonging to an impoverished descendant of a noble family.

"Slip the ring on your finger, and see what it looks like," said Ludwig.

Olga obeyed, all unconscious that Ludwig was biting his lips with suppressed emotion. "It's very beautiful," she said. "I love the deep, warm shades of the central garnets." As she handed the ring back to the merchant she added, "Some day, if I make a fortune, I'll come back and buy the ring and lots more garnets besides. I like the stones ever so much better than rubies."

"Why wait?" said Ludwig. "Keep the ring. I'll buy it for you and that bracelet to match."

Olga blushed. "I couldn't think of accepting such lovely presents from you." As she noticed Ludwig's face darken with anger, she added, "I'll explain outside," and beat a hasty retreat towards the door.

"Put the ring on one side, I may come back for it later," said Ludwig.

"Very well," replied the garnet merchant. "It's a bargain and I know would give you and the young lady satisfaction."

Once in the street Olga suggested to Ludwig that they should go to the Strahov Gardens, where they could talk uninterruptedly.

"As you will," replied Ludwig sulkily. "I don't care where we go now that I know you don't care for me."

"I don't want to annoy you, but you see I can't accept an expensive present from you. I'm not that sort of girl."

"Good God! I know there's nothing wrong about you. I'd hoped, though, you'd let me give you the ring to celebrate our engagement. I've tried over and over again to propose to you, but never had the pluck until to-day. Both my parents like you and they'd welcome you with open arms as a daughter. You're my first love, and I'll never think of any other woman."

Olga did not want to hurt Ludwig's feelings. She feared that if she refused him outright, he might wreak vengeance on Gretchen and Georg. This thought

terrified her, Gretchen had saved her from starvation, or worse, and to jeopardize the newly-established prosperity of her friends was something Olga could not do. She would rather marry Ludwig, and bid farewell to Petrovka, than wreck the life of her old nurse. Olga, therefore, temporized. Instead of telling Ludwig that she would never marry him, and did not want to be burdened with a husband at all, unless the said husband could assist her to fame as a pianist, Olga said that she was only eighteen, and did not intend to think of settling down until she was at least twenty-one. Further, she thought it best to preserve from Ludwig the secret of her origin and he, fearful that Olga would seek employment away from Tannenkop if he were importunate, agreed to wait as long as she wished for her answer.

Before they left the Strahov Gardens, Ludwig took Olga's hands in his and remarked, "I'll buy that garnet ring, anyway, in the hope that you'll very soon consent to wear it."

CHAPTER XII

BLACK AND WHITE

It was the summer of 1920, and all the members of the inn staff were busy, owing to the influx of holiday-makers, who had been attracted to Tannenkop by Anton Bayl's shrewd propaganda and publicity campaign.

At the request of two philanthropic, but unbusiness-like, old ladies, who had organized a home for disabled soldiers, Olga, at the close of a special Sunday night concert, was to make a collection on behalf of this charity. The old ladies had promised to supply a collecting-box, bearing the name of the home. As this did not reach the inn in time, Olga was obliged to carry round an ordinary salver, while Georg, nervous and hesitating, blunderingly announced from the platform the object to which the money would be devoted. Delighted with the financial success of her efforts, Olga persuaded Georg to mount the platform once again and, before the audience dispersed, thank those who had placed contributions in the plate. To Olga's distress, however, Georg thanked the audience on her behalf, as though she were the one to benefit by the sum raised. Ludwig tried to assure Olga afterwards that Georg's involved speech did not matter a bit, for everyone knew the cause for which the collection was intended, but Olga was much perturbed lest people might think she was attempting to augment her own finances under cover of a fictitious war charity.

Olga, who was the last to leave the artistes' room, hurried towards the service staircase where, to her surprise, she found her progress barred by a man whom

she had never seen before. He bowed to her politely and, after complimenting her upon her playing, asked her to have coffee with him on the terrace, because he was very interested in the charity, on behalf of which she had just performed, and wanted to hear more about it. Overjoyed to have an opportunity of explaining in detail the contretemps about the collecting-box, Olga accepted the invitation, but as soon as they were seated her companion appeared to lose all interest in the soldiers' home. He called a waiter, ordered a bottle of Tokay, despite Olga's assurances that she preferred coffee, lavished further praise upon her performance, poured out two glasses of wine and proceeded to drink her health. Olga sipped her Tokay gingerly. It was the most expensive wine in the inn cellar, and she knew Gretchen would be delighted that some had been ordered. Olga felt uncomfortable, almost guilty, however, that her companion had purchased it on her account. He drank the wine rapidly, and after the third glass, moving his chair nearer to hers, began to stroke her hand.

Olga rose to go. "I came to tell you about the soldiers' home for which I made the collection," she said. "As you don't seem to wish to hear anything about it, there's no need for me to remain."

At once the man was on his guard. "I beg your pardon that I've not given you the chance to talk about it. It's your fault, you make such a charming listener that I've been tempted to say a great deal more than I intended. Please sit down again, and I promise to be good."

Drawing her chair away from his, Olga resumed her seat and began, in methodical fashion, to enlarge upon the soldiers' home and how sadly it needed support.

As she talked Olga's companion smiled, and again the girl was tempted to rise and leave him. Again the thought of Gretchen influenced her. Olga told herself that, after all, she was only a hotel employee and, as such,

must be polite to guests and encourage them to patronize the bar. By this time, the man had ordered cognac and coffee, and Olga feared that if she were discourteous he would make a scene, and she would be blamed by Gretchen for having insulted a generous visitor. Therefore, Olga continued her eulogy of the charity until the coffee had been served. She refused the brandy, but her host, after filling his own glass, bade the waiter leave the bottle on the neighbouring table.

Again the stranger stroked Olga's hand and then, becoming more adventuresome, placed his arm round her waist. "Really, my dear," he said in a slightly mocking tone, "I'm not a bit interested in this alleged soldiers' home, about which you are so unnecessarily eloquent. If, however, you've a personal interest in it, it's an entirely different matter. If you want funds for yourself, you've only to come to my room when everyone's asleep, and I'll be delighted to make a substantial contribution to your collecting plate. My room's Number Ten, on the first floor."

Olga was disgusted at the proposal, but managed to control her temper, and remarked quietly, "If you really want to give something to the charity, you can send the money to my room, in the morning. Any of the servants can bring it to me."

The man chuckled sarcastically. "You're a clever little hypocrite," he remarked, "but don't you think you've been keeping this up a bit too long? Why do you hesitate to come to my room? You're not likely to meet anyone in the corridors at night, for this is a quiet sort of place. Supposing though you did meet somebody. You could always make the excuse that you thought some of the windows had been left open, and, being one of the staff, were going down to close them. I'd offer to come to your room, but that'd be more risky, for I don't know my way about the hotel. Don't forget. Number Ten." As he concluded this

speech, the man reached for the bottle of brandy which the waiter had placed on the table behind him. After pouring out a glass for Olga, which he intended to lift to her lips, he turned round to find that her chair was empty. Taking advantage of his absorption, Olga had slipped silently away.

The next morning Olga avoided the guests, finding so many excuses for keeping in Ludwig's company that the delighted and mistaken young man thought the time was drawing nigh when the garnet ring would adorn Olga's finger. It was not until the gentleman from Number Ten had departed with bag and baggage to catch the afternoon train, that Olga ventured to leave the hotel and turn into the pine forest. She made for a remote clump of rocks, overlooking a thickly-wooded ravine. She wanted to think, but found reflection in the inn impossible. The spirits of Georg and Gretchen had risen in proportion to the increase in the takings and the more cheerful they became, the more they talked. Olga's head often ached from their voluble gratitude. They repeated their schemes of future hotel improvements until frequently Olga nearly wept, because Gretchen took it for granted that Olga would remain at Tannenkop, marry Ludwig and relinquish her desire to become Petrovka.

The incident of the previous evening increased Olga's desire to escape from the cul-de-sac into which circumstances had forced her. She decided that excuse could be found for the man who had insulted her. After all, what was she in the eyes of the world? Nothing better, socially, than a cabaret girl. How was the stranger to guess that she was more squeamish than others of this class, especially when she had permitted him to order by far the most expensive wine and liqueur obtainable? When would she be able to start her career as Petrovka? This was Olga's chief problem, which clamoured persistently for solution. In whatever mental cupboard

she placed it, down it would tumble into the very forefront of her brain, to plague her unmercifully.

Suddenly Olga was startled by a moan that proceeded from the ravine, near the edge of which she was sitting. She bent forward, listening intently. The sound was repeated. Some human being was in pain, of that there could be no doubt. Olga started to her feet, the cries were weakening, and she feared that if they ceased, she would have great difficulty in locating the sufferer. As she started to descend the hill side, she realized that the person in distress, though hidden from view, was nearer than she had imagined, for she could now distinguish the word "Help!"

It was years since Olga had heard a word of English, and at the sound of her native tongue, she turned almost dizzy with excitement, for it recalled her mother.

"Coming!" Olga replied. "Go on calling so that I know where to find you." She was not long in reaching the scene of the accident, a steep, slippery, short cut between two zigzag curves of the rough mountain path. On the incline, she saw a man huddled up, nursing his foot. It was not until she reached the bend of the path below him that Olga was able to distinguish his appearance, for the trees cast a shadow over his face. As she looked upward, however, she remarked that the man was very dark-skinned, but she did not know sufficient about Asiatics to realize that he was an Indian. He was thick-set, dressed in mountaineering costume that had evidently been purchased in the neighbourhood of Tannenkop, and his green cloth hat, jauntily turned up on one side with a bunch of feathers, lay on a stone. As Olga approached, the owner of the hat pushed back his oily, jet black hair, that had fallen over his eyes. Olga noticed that his hands were extraordinarily small for so stocky a person, while on the little finger of his right hand he wore a solitaire diamond ring, which she took to be of great value.

"I'm awfully sorry to trouble you," the Indian said, delighted at Olga's fresh appearance in a blue cotton frock and straw hat trimmed with cornflowers. "I'm afraid I've broken my leg. It's awfully painful, and I can't take my boot off."

"Perhaps I can help you," said Olga, kneeling in front of the man and proceeding to unlace his leather leggings. These were easily removed, but it was impossible to dislodge the boot from the damaged foot, as the slightest movement caused the wearer to groan with agony.

"I'm a doctor," the man said, "my name's Ali Beg. I must have fractured my leg above the ankle, I think, so that the only thing I can do is to ask you to send for help to the nearest town. Even if you succeed in removing my boot, it won't be of any assistance as I shan't be able to stand, let alone walk."

"I'm so sorry. I'd no idea that it was so serious."

"Yes, it's a damned nuisance, excuse my language." Ali Beg tried to smile, but pain changed his effort into a grimace.

"I'll go at once for help," said Olga. "Tannenkop isn't far, and I'll be back with the hospital bearers and a stretcher in less than an hour. Would you like some water? I'm afraid I can't offer you anything else, but the water's very pure. Perhaps you've a drinking-cup." Olga noticed that Ali Beg was wearing a belt, suspended from which were mountaineering contraptions that delight the heart of the amateur climber and arouse the derision of the professional.

"There's a cup in my knapsack. Don't worry about the water. I can take some whisky which you'll find in a flask. It won't hurt me to take it neat. I'm used to it. I've spent many years in Scotland." Despite his agony, Ali Beg was desirous that the charming stranger should not think him an outsider, and whenever he was anxious to prove to Europeans that his outlook was

Western, he made a point of proclaiming his disregard of the ban placed upon alcohol by Muhammad the Prophet.

Ali Beg gulped down the whisky greedily. "That's better," he said. "I'll try to go to sleep until you return. Please don't think me rude for not thanking you more for your kindness. I'm most awfully grateful, really, but my ankle's paining like hell."

Olga hastened to the inn where she found Gretchen with sleeves rolled up, supervising the kitchen-maid, who was cleansing freshly-caught trout for the evening meal. Gretchen possessed the knack of being able to attend to several things at the same time. Without desisting from her domestic activities, she listened attentively to Olga's story, and asked Georg who had entered the kitchen, to telephone for a hospital stretcher and bearers. "That'll give you time to change your wet shoes and have a hot grog before you go back to the forest," the hustling housekeeper said to Olga.

"But I'm not cold," Olga pleaded. "Really, I don't need anything. It's summer time, you know."

"All the more reason for you to take a hot drink," Gretchen retorted. "There's always a chill in the forest just before sunset. I don't want to have you ill on my hands. I've quite enough to do without becoming sick nurse into the bargain. Mind that fish," she shouted to the kitchen-maid, "I tell you it'll never look fit to serve at table if you mess it about like that. I've told you to be careful time and again." Gretchen switched her attention from the fish to Olga. "What'll the inn do if you can't give the concerts that are announced? Ludwig's no good at all as a musician without you to help him." Suddenly, catching sight of the boy-of-all-work, the housekeeper shrieked excitedly, "Good God! what on earth are you doing with those potatoes, only half-peeling them? Ruin us, that's what you'll do, as sure as fate, serving food that'll drive the guests

away, if it doesn't do worse and poison them." Again Gretchen turned to Olga. "Now we've that good 'cellist, and you, Ludwig and he form a trio, the concerts are a splendid draw. Why Georg told me only to-day that so many tables have been booked for next Sunday, that he's going to reserve the lounge for residents, and let non-residents remain on the terrace and in the garden."

As she talked, Gretchen poured some rum into a glass, added hot water, lemon and sugar, and compelled Olga to drink the toddy which was the older woman's remedy for all the ills that flesh is heir to. "I wish you hadn't to go back to the forest at all," grumbled Gretchen. "I'm afraid you'll be overdone. Only the trouble is, nobody else knows where the poor fellow you've mentioned's lying, and the hospital men are such fools that they'd never find him, if you weren't there to show the way."

"Darling Gretel, I'm not a bit tired, and as it's only six o'clock, I'll have heaps of time to take him to hospital and be back to bath and change before concert time. You know we always wait till after supper to play on Mondays. People get back late from the Monday motor-bus excursion, organized by Ludwig's father, and the week-enders all left for Prague this afternoon."

"Well, I suppose you've got to go then. But, for God's sake, don't try to lift the man, or carry anything, or you're sure to strain your wrists. You remember how careful you had to be when you were studying music not to do any rough work that'd spoil your hands. Now you're always busy in your spare time with needlework, although you told me that needle-pricks are supposed to ruin the sensitiveness of a pianist's touch."

"Yes, I know, darling, but I've got to make my own clothes. Everything's so awfully expensive. I won't ask Ludwig to give me any money beyond the usual allowance."

father arranged that I was to receive, and I must dress a bit."

"You're over-particular. That's what's the matter with you. After all, Olga, you wear out your frocks in the inn, and I think you're a fool not to ask for an increase of salary for this reason."

Olga stopped Gretchen's eloquence with a kiss, for she detested the manner in which the housekeeper discussed private affairs in front of the servants, and sped away to put on thick shoes and a climbing suit. In this costume she fascinated Ali as he caught sight of her, escorted by a middle-aged man, whom he took to be a doctor, and four youths bearing a stretcher.

"How good of you to take all this trouble!" the Indian exclaimed. He could speak no German, so that Olga's services as interpreter were indispensable until they reached the hospital, where the patient was delivered to a doctor and nursing-sister, who had acquired a smattering of English during the War.

Olga made daily visits to the hospital. She discovered that, because he was unable to hold a pen, Ali Beg was more distressed about his right hand, which he had poisoned at the time of his accident, than about his leg. As no member of the hospital staff could write English, Olga offered to assist him. While acting as his secretary, she came to know a good deal about the life of this stranger, who had so unexpectedly fallen across her path. Ali Beg, who was an M.D. of Edinburgh University, had commenced his studies in Scotland before the War. Prior to his return to India, where a post was awaiting him, he had been inspecting watering-places in Central Europe, with a view to acquainting himself with the special medicinal properties of the various springs. From Tannenkop, he had intended to continue his walking-tour to Teplitz, Karlsbad, and Marienbad, and then, after visiting Budapest and Vienna, return to Paris, where he had left his heavy luggage, and finally

catch the P. and O. steamer, *Shah Jahan*, from Marseilles the following November.

At first Olga visited the invalid out of compassion, but soon began to derive real pleasure from her conversations with him. Ali Beg was well read, and was enchanted to find that he could interest and impress Olga with his knowledge of English literature. As soon as his first bankers' remittance arrived, he handed Olga ten pounds, and begged her to obtain from Prague a number of English books, in order, so he said, to have the pleasure of reading his favourites with her. The girl was delighted to have an opportunity of practising her mother tongue, as well as of renewing acquaintance with British authors, and Ali, as soon as he heard that Olga was a pianist, pretended great enthusiasm for European music, of which he did actually know more than the average Indian.

So pleasantly did the days slip by for Ali that he malingered, and it was the middle of August before, on the repeated representations of the doctors, he consented to leave the hospital. By this time he had abandoned crutches, but still walked with sticks, and, as he had increased in weight during his ten weeks' inactivity, he looked considerably older than his actual age, which was thirty-two. He decided to remove to the inn, where he attended assiduously every concert, and obtained Olga's permission to sit in her sanctum while she practised. She was touched by the patient manner in which he would remain silent while she did her daily drill of scales, arpeggios and passage-work, never interrupting, nor urging that they should go and enjoy the sunshine outside. Ali seemed so lonely, so sincere, and the thought of his approaching return to India seemed to give him so little pleasure, that Olga felt extremely sorry for him. He told her that he was only going home as a duty, because all his brothers had died, and he felt it to be incumbent upon him to be near his

father and mother, of whom he spoke with great affection. Incidentally, he misrepresented them as being very wealthy, for he desired to achieve a self-portrait, that, to Olga, would be attractive in every detail.

Olga became convinced of the soundness of Ali's judgment and of his worldly wisdom. It seemed to her that at last she had met a sage from the outside world, who could advise her how to escape from the morass of routine that threatened to frustrate her ambition. Therefore, she broke through the reserve she had so assiduously cultivated, and, in confidence, told the Indian of her two consuming desires, to find her mother and to become Petrovka. She explained that unless she could appear publicly in conditions of which Petroff would have approved, she would never use the pseudonym bestowed upon her by the virtuoso. "If he were alive to see me now, an innkeeper's drudge, he would be furious," she added, "and I don't want to insult his memory by taking his name in my present surroundings."

Ali professed great sympathy. He promised to correspond with a friend whom he described as very influential, and likely to be of assistance to Olga. In subsequent talks with the pianist he often deplored the delay in receiving a reply. About the middle of September, Ali announced that he would be compelled to bid farewell to Tannenkop within three weeks, and invited Olga, Georg, Gretchen, and Ludwig, together with the doctors and nursing-sisters of the hospital, to a farewell dinner, for which he engaged a private room at the inn.

Olga was much distressed at the prospect of Ali's departure, for she felt that with it would pass unseized her one chance of escape from Tannenkop.

In Scotland, during the War, Ali had lived very modestly, and by dint of cheeseparing from the small allowance made him by his father, and from the fees he had received when assistant to an Edinburgh physician, he had managed to save a thousand or so odd pounds.

By nature Ali was parsimonious, and his tastes were frugal, but though a miser behind closed doors, he had the Indian love of making a show in public. Ali only squandered money upon some object that he considered well worth while the expenditure involved. Such an object was Olga. He wanted her as a wife, and was willing to employ any means to obtain her. He planned to dispatch his guests except Olga, to the cinema, after a Gargantuan dinner, arranged to convince Olga of his wealth. Then when he and Olga were alone, Ali intended to propose to her. He hoped she would be sufficiently dazzled by his generosity to accept him, if not for love, then for the money and influence which she would imagine he possessed.

When post-prandial conviviality had set in, each lady was presented with an expensive box of chocolates, but Olga's box contained, in addition to chocolates, a gold chain, with garnet pendant, shaped like a grand piano. All the guests were loud in their thanks to their host, except Ludwig, who, on the plea of feeling unwell, had spoken scarcely a word during the banquet. Of all those present, Ali was the only person conscious of Ludwig's hostility, and it pleased the Indian right well that Ludwig should be jealous of him because of Olga. As each lady left the room, Ali saluted, Indian fashion, raising his right hand, back outwards to his forehead, for the express purpose of displaying the diamond ring on his little finger.

From the dining-room Olga went direct to her bedroom, to prepare for the short concert which was to take place before the company proceeded to the cinema. While she was washing her hands, there was a knock at the door. "Come in," she called.

Before she had time to dry her hands, Ludwig had entered and closed the door behind him. "Give me the pendant and chain that nigger gave you," he muttered, beads of perspiration standing on his forehead. "I'll

return them to him. We don't want his gifts, do we, darling?" Ludwig mopped his brow nervously. "Only say you'll hand me his filthy presents, and I'll forgive you all the agony you've caused me since that brute broke his leg. Damn him! I wish to God he'd broken his neck."

Olga stared in amazement. All animation died from her countenance as though she had been converted into a statue. Never before had Ludwig seen her face so drawn, nor heard her voice so harsh, as when she retorted, "You must be mad. I've no intention of giving back Mr. Beg's present. You're my employer, it's true, but you're exceeding your rights when you presume to dictate to me about the gifts I receive."

At the word "employer" Ludwig released Olga's wet hands which he had been clasping feverishly, and paced up and down the room. "Very well, Fräulein Petermann," he growled, "you say that I exceed my rights as an employer, but I'd have you know I'm within my rights when I dismiss you from my service. You refuse my garnets, yet you accept the nigger's because you think he's more influential than I. You'd better go to him for your next job. Neither my father nor I wish to have in our service a girl whose instincts are those of a common prostitute."

"That's a lie, and you know it. But I accept your dismissal and won't stop here a moment longer than I can help."

"You may suit your own convenience." Already Ludwig was beginning to regret his fit of rage. "I've no wish for you to leave the inn, until you've found congenial employment elsewhere."

"Thank you," said Olga frigidly. "I'll leave as soon as I possibly can. I've no wish to remain where I'm not wanted." Olga turned her back on Ludwig and began to brush her hair.

Had she given him the slightest encouragement,

Ludwig would have implored her forgiveness. He could have bitten out his tongue for having likened Olga to a prostitute. Seeing how collected Olga was, despite her indignation, Ludwig feared that he had driven her to seek consolation from Ali."

"Hadn't you better get your violin?" Olga put down her powder-puff and looked at her watch. "I'm ready and it's time for the concert to begin."

"I won't play," said Ludwig peevishly, "and you won't either, unless you're absolutely heartless."

"What and break faith with Mr. Beg? He told me what you're charging him for the dinner and concert. I consider the figure excessive, but that's none of my business. However, although I'm under notice to leave, I'll try to give Mr. Beg good value for his money, so far as my share of the entertainment's concerned. If you won't play, I'll substitute pianoforte solos for your numbers, and I'll guarantee that the audience won't be losers." Olga hastened from the room, leaving Ludwig entirely nonplussed.

Ludwig now regretted that he had refused to perform, for he knew that he would be plagued by curiosity as to what was taking place between Olga and Ali Beg. At last, Ludwig's restlessness got the better of him, and he resorted to the undignified procedure of climbing on to the flat roof of the lounge, and gazing through the open fan-lights at an angle from which he could see the artistes without being seen by them. He thought Olga had never before looked so charming as when she mounted the platform, but, to his jaundiced eye, her garnet pendant flashed evil rays as she seated herself at the piano.

Ali was secretly delighted at Ludwig's non-appearance, for it enabled him to make a special speech of thanks to Olga for stepping into the breach and contributing extra solos. Like most Indians, Ali was eloquent, and there was much applause as one of the hospital staff

translated, more or less accurately, his remarks into German.

According to Ali's instructions, Georg and Gretchen shepherded the guests, except Olga, to the local cinema. Complaining that his leg was aching, Ali asked whether Olga would make the sacrifice of keeping him company in the garden, instead of joining the others.

"I'd much rather stay and talk," the girl replied. "The cinema's stuffy and I've already a bit of a headache."

"Ah, I'm afraid I'm to blame for that," Ali remarked. "I shouldn't have allowed you to give those extra solos in place of Mr. Bayl's items, but I enjoy your playing so much that when you begin I never want you to stop, and I forget that I'm overtaxing your strength."

Olga and Ali Beg ensconced themselves in basket chairs on one of the rock terraces hewn out of the hill side.

Out of sight and ear-shot of the house, Olga unburdened herself of her troubles, reflecting that Ali was the only person in whom she could confide and that she might have no further opportunity of a confidential chat with him. "It wasn't playing that tired me," Olga explained. "I'm never so happy as when I'm at the piano performing to appreciative listeners like you. What has upset me a bit is that Ludwig has just given me the sack."

"What?" Ali could scarcely conceal his delight. "I'm very sorry to hear this," he continued hypocritically. "But surely, Mr. Bayl realizes your value too highly to agree to your leaving the inn. He must know that a large proportion of the guests only come here because of the wonderful musical treats you give them."

"Well, anyway, I'm leaving and I don't know whether to be glad or sorry. I hate to talk against Ludwig, for both he and his father have been very kind to me. Next

to Gretchen, they're my best friends, but really Ludwig's become intolerably interfering of late."

"How do you mean?" asked Ali guardedly.

Olga then described the scene that had taken place in her bedroom and, enchanted that Olga had confided in him, Ali was loud in condemnation of Bayl's behaviour. "The man's a fool," Ali declared. "I can't understand jealousy, for it's so perfectly futile. No man's going to hold a woman's affections in thrall by losing his temper."

"You're perfectly right."

"But tell me, what are you going to do when you leave the inn?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet."

"You're wasted in a place like Tannenkop. What you ought to do, of course, is to undertake a big concert tour."

"That's what I'd like to do best of all, but how? I can't finance it. You see I've no influence and influence is everything."

"You remember the friend to whom I wrote for advice about your career?"

Olga nodded.

"Well I had a letter from him only this morning. I'd have told you earlier in the day, but I'd no chance of a word alone with you, because you were so busy in connection with my party."

"As I've told you before, it's awfully good of you to have written about me. What does your friend say?"

"He suggests you should tour Asia. He's right. The East's the only part of the world in which to make money these unsettled days."

"But how in the world can I afford it?"

"It has occurred to me that father, a well-known barrister, might arrange for you to visit the courts of several Indian princes, who'd give you introductions to other rulers. My friend too says in his letter that he'd

write to his people in Delhi and get them to take an interest in you if you went out to India."

"But what a gorgeous idea!" Olga jumped at the conclusion that all Indian potentates, like the Grand Dukes of Grafburg, loved and understood European music.

Delighted at the girl's mistake, which he resolved to foster, Ali launched forth into a eulogy of the manner in which maharajas encourage art, and act as patrons of Europeans singers and instrumentalists. He spoke of the grand pianos purchased in Europe and shipped to India at enormous cost. He omitted to state, however, that the majority of these instruments are never played upon, never tuned, have broken strings, moth-eaten felts and rusty frames. Neither did he add that they merely serve as tables on which are displayed massive silver frames containing signed photographs of viceroys, generals, lieutenant-governors and their dames in court dress, as well as colour portraits of ruling princes laden with jewellery.

Ali further represented all Indian cities as being athirst for European music. He convinced Olga that by affording them an opportunity of hearing the masterpieces of the great composers, she would be supplying a keen demand, so that the financial, as well as the artistic, success of her tour would be assured. "There's only one obstacle," added Ali sadly, when he considered that the quicksilver of Olga's enthusiasm had reached a sufficient height for her to agree to any proposal to avoid the wreckage of her castles in the air.

"What's that?" asked Olga timidly.

"Well you know," Ali coughed and fiddled with his chair to prolong Olga's anxiety, "you know what the world is. I hate to mention it, but——" he hesitated.

"Please go on," said Olga in a voice muffled by dread. She feared to be engulfed by a breaker of disappointment and gripped the arm of the chair for support.

"Well, to put it brutally," said Ali who had observed Olga's gesture with satisfaction, "if people hear that my father and I are helping you, they'll immediately put an evil construction upon our assistance. On no account could I think of allowing your good name and unsullied reputation to be defiled by any breath of scandal, no matter how unfounded that scandal might be." In his desire to appear convincing, like a diplomatist, Ali Beg spoke deliberately with dramatic emphasis, and carefully chosen words, which, to Olga, had she known the world, would have rung false.

"I see," said Olga sadly. All the light seemed to have gone out of her life with Ali's last remark.

"Olga," Ali's voice was wonderfully gentle, "why not come to India as my wife? If you were my wife, instead of condemning me, the world would approve of my helping you in your career. What greater joy could I have than to assist in the recognition of my wife's genius?"

All unconscious of her companion's thoughts, Olga became engrossed in the mental debate which Ali's question had launched. She did not love Ali, if love were the ecstasy described by poets. She had no wish, however, to experience this devastating emotion, desiring to keep all her soul-stirring enthusiasms for her art. On the other hand, she was genuinely fond of the Indian. During the months she had known Ali, he had never once profited by the many occasions when they had been alone together, to attempt to caress her as most Westerners would have done. Erroneously, she imagined that the Asiatic, like herself, was too engrossed in matters intellectual and artistic to take any great interest in love-making. Ali too was better-looking than Ludwig, and seemed to her far more a man of the world than anyone else she had ever met. She anticipated that if she married Ali she would be too busy with her concert tours to have much time to devote to the sexual

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side of matrimony, which, to her, seemed a matter of minor importance. While thus summing up the situation, Olga sat perfectly still, but her agile brain worked quickly and she soon made a lightning decision.

Apprehensive that the slightest indication of sexual passions might balance the scales against him, she remained rigid also, scarce daring to breathe.

Suddenly Olga turned towards him and spoke quietly as she gave the reply which, even as she spoke, traced out her life's course on the rock surface of the future. "My dear," she said, "I'm going to be perfectly candid with you. I'm not in love with you; I admit it, but I like you far better than any other man I've ever met. If you're willing to marry me under these conditions, I will come to India as your wife, provided, of course, that you'll help me to fulfil my ambition to become famous as Petrovka."

It was not an ideal acceptance of a fiancé. There was nothing ecstatic in Olga's tones, nor did she feel overjoyed. Her sentiments were those of a gambler, who, having staked his all at the gaming tables, waits to see what the winning number will be. The reply, however, was sufficient to satisfy Ali, who, copying a Continental fashion that appealed to his sense of the melodramatic, pressed his lips to Olga's hand. "Thank you, thank you, darling," he murmured.

Ali considered that when Olga was his wife the depth of her affection would be a matter of small moment, for once in his mother's *zenana*, she would have to wait upon him, bear him children, become his chattel. When contemplating married life, he had already decided that, should Olga become his bride, he would raise no objection to her using contraceptives, should she wish to do so, until they reached India. Once in his own home, however, he would put an end to all practice of birth control, which he regarded as one of the greatest curses brought to the East by the West. "Of course you don't know the meaning

of love yet," Ali added. "How should you? We Indians don't wish girls to experience that sacred emotion before marriage. We consider it the sacred right of a husband to teach his wife the signification of that blessed word, and it will be my greatest privilege to have you as my pupil." Then he clasped Olga in his arms.

Olga was almost terrified by the fervour of his embrace, and the darkness of his skin, exaggerated in the moonlight, suddenly, and alarmingly, suggested to her a wild animal. Because of the heat, Ali was not wearing a waistcoat. During his caress one of his shirt buttons, too small for its hole, became undone, and Olga caught sight of a gorilla-like thatch of black hair on Ali's chest. As soon as she could, she freed herself from his arms. Then her heart smote her. She remembered Ali's lameness, and felt it would be brutal of her to leave him to hobble back to the inn alone. Therefore, with an effort, she kissed his cheek, which seemed to her far darker than it had been before she accepted him as her future husband. "Let's go in, dear," she said faintly, "the others'll be coming back from the cinema and you must be in the hall to say good-bye to your guests."

"As you will, my darling," said Ali, rising clumsily with Olga's assistance. "You'll find little Dream Lady that I'll do anything you want. You can lead me wherever you like and I'll follow, so great is the force of my love." Ali's voice shook with emotion, part real, part feigned.

CHAPTER XIII

FANCY DRESS

SOME of the first-class passengers, who had travelled overland to Marseilles in November 1920, might have been excused for anathematizing the Maharaja of Ghanapur who, with his staff, was to join the S.S. *Shah Jahan* at Port Said. Being a ruling prince, the Raja required the best accommodation in the ship, and the people who had to make way for their unexpected, but distinguished, fellow-passenger had to be content with berths other than those engaged for them by their agents. This was Olga's first real sea journey, and both she, and her husband, Dr Syed Ali Beg, were as angry as the other travellers, when they found that their two-berth outer cabin, on a high deck, on the "cool" side of the ship, was not available for their reception. When, upon embarking at Marseilles, Olga found that their accommodation had been changed, she conceived a dislike for the Maharaja of Ghanapur who, she felt, must be an exceedingly disagreeable and selfish person.

The voyage started like all other voyages to India. Olga remarked how clannish were the British officials, who formed themselves into water-tight compartments, in accordance with seniority and service. Most of the *burra-memsahibs*¹ gave her the cold shoulder and forced her to run the gauntlet of their lorgnettes when she approached their sacrosanct circles, and she surmised, rightly, that the reason for their rudeness was her Indian husband. Not so, however, the young officers and civilians, for Olga was very charming to look at in

¹ *burra-memsahib*, wife of a senior British official in India.

her smart trousseau frocks, upon which, although she was unaware of the fact, Ali had spent far more than he had intended, when endeavouring to impress her with his lavishness. Moreover, she was willing to take part in dancing and deck games.

On the second afternoon at sea, not thinking that she would attract listeners, because the music saloon and adjoining deck were deserted, Olga tried the Chappell grand piano. It was a good instrument and, wonderful for a ship's piano, in perfect tune. Forgetful of her surroundings, Olga played a Chopin *Ballade*. The soul-stirring music, rendered even to inexperienced ears with consummate skill, attracted after-lunch strollers to the saloon and the saloon windows. After the closing chords, there was vigorous clapping and Olga, looking up, noticed that many of the lounges were occupied. Pleased by the sincere applause she had earned, Olga was easily persuaded to give encores and, thereafter, Mrs Ali Beg's afternoon recitals became the order of the day.

Much to the annoyance of the other girls, the young men vied in their attentions to Olga, and her husband had difficulty in concealing his jealousy. The green-eyed monster clawed at his vitals. He squirmed at the thought that his girl wife, on whom he had spent his hard-won savings, because of musical talents which he could not justly appreciate, was received with adulation by the male passengers, who were scarcely civil to him, her Asiatic husband. His former pride in the possession of a gifted wife gave place to shame at his own lack of social gifts. When Ali Beg married Olga he thought that the English hatred of mixed marriages belonged to the past—now he realized his error. To the super-sensitive Ali Beg, every critical glance in his direction on the *Shah Jahan* was a stab, and every attention paid to Olga, an insult. Like others of his race he would not understand the freedom of European women, and writhed when he saw Olga dancing or playing games with

men who were total strangers. He contrasted Olga on board and Olga in Tannenkop, and the comparison bewildered him. He could not comprehend how the gentle, affectionate girl of the inn could be metamorphosed into a modern flirt. He failed to realize that it was merely the emergence of a butterfly from a chrysalis, and that Olga, reacting after years of depression and hard work, without relaxation, was taking full advantage of the pleasures afforded by her new surroundings. He was totally incapable of comprehending that the admiration evoked by her playing was her birthright as an artiste. Ali Beg yearned for the time when he would thrust Olga, an unwelcome intruder, into the *zenana*, over which his mother ruled with a rod of iron, for he could not endure the respite from marital authority afforded her by the voyage.

Olga loved to entertain the passengers with her music and felt that, at last, she moved amongst influential people who could assist her in her art, and who would have met with the approval of her mother and Petroff, both of whom would have condemned the bourgeois society of Gretchen and Ludwig. Ignorant that her capacity for frivolity was a heritage from Longford her father, Olga herself marvelled at her delight in amusements and philandering. As her bridal docility vanished, she began to question the wisdom of her marriage with Ali Beg, contrasting her portly, clumsy and morose Indian husband with the slim, athletic, cheerful and handsome lads who swarmed round her chair like wasps round a marmalade jar. She admitted to herself that, had it not been for Ali, she might never have succeeded in emerging from the slough of Tannenkop. She shuddered, however, at the thought of a future, extending as far as her mental eye could see, with a man whom she liked less and less each day, and who appeared to grudge her all enjoyment; a husband who, instead of rejoicing over the artistic triumph of his wife, endeavoured to

dissuade her from playing the piano, on the plea that people would think she was showing off.

Ali Beg fancied that Olga adopted a patronizing manner towards him and this riled him exceedingly.

"Ali dear, I do so wish you danced, I'd love to teach you, and I'm sure we'd get on famously together. Do let me put you through your first steps to-morrow afternoon to the ship's gramophone."

Ali Beg turned away, feeling more like an assassin than a husband, while one of the young subalterns, whom he had grown to loathe, claimed Olga for the next fox-trot.

This was Ali Beg's frame of mind when the *Shah Jahan* glided into Port Said early one morning. Here his vanity received another blow. The young people had arranged to hold a fancy dress ball when the vessel would have passed through the Red Sea and have left Aden. Olga was delighted at the prospect and, as she did not possess a fancy dress, induced her spouse to take her to Aaron Satz, at whose store, so she was assured, anything and everything was obtainable. Several of the younger passengers, also in need of fancy costumes, were already at the counter devoted to the supply of these garments, and Ali Beg was bantered about his selection. The chaff was entirely good-humoured, but Ali Beg could not take it in good part. One facetious subaltern suggested that Ali should attire himself as an Indian *bakim*¹ and dispense love-philtres to the company. This raised a general laugh.

"The very thing," cried another. "I'll black myself all over and come as Hakim Beg's coolie. A loin-cloth'd make an absolutely topping fancy dress for the Indian Ocean. I'll carry the love mixture in a *chatti*² on my head, on condition that I'd have my doses free of charge. Everyone else, of course, 'd have to pay five chips³ a head."

¹ Muhammadan physician.

² Water pot.

³ Slang for rupee.

Again there was a laugh at Ali who, with a great effort, managed to conceal his discomfiture. He raged inwardly at the suggestion that he, Dr Syed Ali Beg, M.D. of Edinburgh University, as he described himself on his visiting cards, should appear in the company of a youth representing a coolie, and took the mention of blacking to be a studied allusion to his own dusky skin. Ali Beg had an absurd idea of his own dignity and importance, and said at length with painful deliberation and an abortive smile, "I'm afraid dancing isn't much in my line, and *hakims*, you know, shouldn't be frivolous, but my wife I'm sure'll represent the pair of us very worthily."

As Ali stalked away, Olga realized his annoyance and hurried to his side. "They didn't mean any harm," she whispered. "It was all their fun and you mustn't mind them." In her desire to pacify him and avoid a scene she added, with an effort, "If you'd rather I didn't take part in the dance, of course I won't."

"But you must take part now," Ali insisted. "Why you're one of the moving spirits. If you don't, your friends'll blame me and say that I don't wish you to enjoy yourself. You must join in with the others now that the arrangement has gone so far."

"You really mean it? You really want me to take part?"

"Of course, dear." The last word was rasped out as though Ali's vocal chords required oiling. "I insist. Go back to the others and choose what you like. I'll wait for you at the cash desk near the main entrance."

Ali Beg trembled with suppressed rage as he saw Olga flit back joyfully to her companions, as though delighted to escape from her husband. The hot blood mounted to his brain, and he was obliged to grip the edge of a counter to regain self-control. Yet he dared not face the derision of the English passengers, by forbidding his wife to take part in the amusements he could not comprehend.

Soon after the *Shah Jahan* had left Marseilles, Olga, and five other girls with whom she had become acquainted, decided to be a troupe of pierrettes at the fancy dress ball, and this idea had met with the warm approval of the young men. Before the vessel reached Port Said, the girls' jealousy of Olga, because of her popularity with the men on board, caused her to be anything but a *persona grata* with her own sex. But their dancing partners reminded the girls so persistently of the pierrette arrangement, that, in order not to show their pique, Olga's five companions decide to adhere to the plan. Consequently, when Olga returned to make her purchases, she followed their example and bought a short, white, full-skirted frock. Her most ardent admirer, Carter, urged her to select black trimmings, not coloured pompons and ruffles such as her colleagues had chosen, and it was well for Olga's peace of mind that Ali Beg, at the remote end of the shop, did not witness the interest which the young subaltern displayed in Olga's shopping. Believing that Ali was really wealthy, Olga had no qualms when she joined her husband at the cash desk. She insisted upon carrying her parcel herself. This, though she was unaware of it, was a wise precaution. Her cheerfulness irritated Ali so much that, had he been in charge of the fancy costume he would have probably succumbed to the temptation to drop it into the sea. They returned to the *Shah Jahan* at nine a.m., Aaron Satz's store having opened very early for the convenience of *Shah Jahan* passengers.

During the shopping expedition, the much talked-of Raja had arrived on board. He was accompanied by the impresario, Boris Vronsky, whose *New Art Company* was then performing at the Cairo Opera House. With the prodigal liberality of his class, the Raja had invited Vronsky, who had never passed through the Suez Canal, to accompany him as far as Suez, and Vronsky, who never objected to being entertained at the expense of others, had accepted. The impresario very much

regretted that political necessity compelled the Raja to return suddenly to India, without making his projected tour of Europe and giving the *New Art Company* his further patronage. Vronsky, also, wished that the Maharaja had seen Damaris his most talented star. He had given Marie leave of absence to enable her to make a futile search for Olga in a South German town, whither a false clue had directed her, and she was to rejoin the Company during the following week. Boris had attempted to persuade the Raja to postpone his return to India to witness her performance. The Russian's eloquence had been in vain, for the political necessity compelling the cancellation of the Raja's European tour and his hasty return to his State was nothing less important than the institution of a commission to inquire into the financial position of Ghanapur. The State was suffering from pecuniary syncope, owing to its ruler's wanton extravagance on hotels, *dahabeeyahs*,¹ inlaid furniture, rugs, jewellery, silks, scarabs and hospitality to all and sundry. To the Raja's extreme annoyance, the Government of India insisted upon teaching him the difference between the debit and credit side of his pass-book, and his attitude towards his monitors was similar to that of a naughty schoolboy.

Again the passengers were irritated at the changes made on account of the Maharaja of Ghanapur. Seats at the Captain's table, previously occupied by senior officials of the Indian Civil Service, and officers of the Indian Army, were now reserved for the Maharaja, his Personal Minister, Mr. Krishnamurti and his Private Secretary, Mr. John Durrant. Vronsky, of course, as the Prince's guest was also accommodated at the Captain's table. The Raja, however, made a favourable impression, for during lunch the Captain rose and rapping on the table commanded silence. "I'm requested by His Highness the Maharaja of Ghanapur to ask you to take

¹ Nile sailing-boats.

wine with him, and to drink to the success of our voyage to Bombay. Filled glasses of champagne were rapidly passed round and, rising, the Captain and passengers pledged success to the ship, the voyage and, above all, the health of their wealthy and very genial fellow traveller, His Highness the Maharaja of Ghanapur.

By the time lunch was over, the *Shah Jahan* was far down the Suez Canal and Olga was delighted with the novelty. "What's that funny-looking place?" she inquired of a man at her side, as the pavilion at Ismailia came into sight.

"I'm afraid that I too am making my first trip through the Canal and, like you, don't know, but my friend here, an old traveller, will tell us. Krishnamurti," the speaker turned to an extravagantly dressed Indian in flashy European clothes, "this young lady wants to know what that building is."

The Indian gave the necessary information. "Mr. Durrant," he said, "is really a flatterer when he says I'm an old traveller. If His Highness of Ghanapur, with whom I'm returning to India, had fulfilled his plan of revisiting England where he was educated, I should have seen Europe, at least in part. This, however, is only my second trip through the Canal, and I've merely been as far north as Port Said.

"Why, Mrs Ali Beg," cried two young officers coming to a halt, "we've been waiting for ages in the music room which you've deserted. Your playing's worth much more than this silly old canal."

"Oh, I couldn't play now, really," Olga pleaded. "All this is awfully interesting to me and, besides, there are lots of shipping agents, and touts and salesmen on board. They'd make a very unsympathetic audience. I know the sort," she said laughingly, as she thought of some of the patrons of the Tannenkop inn.

When the officers had resumed their walk, the man, whom she had first addressed, lifted his hat. "Have I

the great good fortune to be speaking to Mrs Ali Beg, the pianist, of whom I've already heard so much? At lunch, the Captain was loud in your praise, and His Highness, who is a keen patron of the arts, is very anxious to hear you perform. Ah, here he comes with Boris Vronsky, the great impresario of whom, no doubt, you've heard."

Olga shook her head.

"You've never heard of Vronsky?"

"You must think me an awful ignoramus," Olga replied, "but you see since the middle of the War I've really lived in the back of beyond, and before the War I was only a little girl, engrossed in my music and too young to know what went on in the outside world."

The answer interested Durrant and he resolved to make opportunities to increase his acquaintance with Mrs Ali Beg. At this juncture, Ali Beg, afraid that his wife's good looks might attract the attention of the Maharaja and Vronsky, drew her hand possessively through his arm.

"Let me take you down to tea, Olga," the Indian said effusively, "we're now in one of the lakes and there's nothing of interest to see."

Olga accompanied her husband unwillingly, for the thought occurred to her that Vronsky might be a useful person for Petrovka, the pianist, to know and she would gladly have made his acquaintance. After swallowing hastily a cup of tea, and until it was time to dress for dinner, Olga remained on deck, her husband glued to her side. She hoped to have another chance of meeting Vronsky, but he was nowhere to be seen. The glaring searchlights that appeared with dusk fascinated her and when dinner was over, she was again on deck, watching for the lights of Port Tewfik and Suez, despite the cold, which caused those of the passengers who had made the voyage before to prefer the warmth of the saloon. Wrapped in a winter coat, she stood with Ali behind the wind screen at the front of the first-class promenade

deck. In the shadow, they were unnoticed by Vronsky and Durrant who paused near them, deep in conversation.

"I assure you," said Durrant, "I'm most grateful. Without your influence with the Raja I'd certainly never have become his secretary."

"We may cry quits," replied Vronsky. "Without your skilful prompting, the Raja wouldn't have patronized my theatre so liberally. But what I do want to stress before I leave the ship is that I count on your propaganda work in India. In your position you're bound to meet many wealthy people, likely to be of use to me when they're in Europe. I shall conclude that Indians, if introduced by you'll be rich, and worth exploiting to our mutual advantage. I've no time to waste over new acquaintances who are hard up. Such people are no good either to you or to me. You agree?"

"Perfectly," said Durrant. "I've had more than enough of poverty-stricken acquaintances to last me a lifetime. I hope I've turned my back on them now for good and all."

The two men were interrupted by a steward. "I've been looking for you everywhere, sir," he said, addressing Vronsky. "The Captain sends his compliments and wants you to join him in his cabin. We'll be off Port Tewfik in ten minutes and you're to leave with the pilot."

Vronsky and Durrant hurried after the man. The vessel glided past the promenade at Port Tewfik and paused to drop the pilot. Then the engines restarted and the *Shah Jahan* was heading for Aden.

On the following morning, Durrant approached the deck-chairs on which Olga and Ali Beg were seated, and bade them good morning.

"Let me introduce my husband," said Olga. "Ali this is Mr Durrant, Secretary to the Maharaja of Ghanapur; Mr Durrant, this is my husband, Dr Ali Beg."

"My object in intruding is to say that I hope Madame

Ali Beg will play the piano to us this afternoon," said Durrant to Ali. "His Highness is very anxious to hear her."

"She requires little persuasion to perform," Ali Beg replied, with a short laugh that emphasized his jealousy. "She'll accede to your request with alacrity, I'm sure, unless, of course, she's nervous about performing before so exalted a personage as His Highness the Maharaja of Ghanapur. Olga will you be too timid to play this afternoon as Mr Durrant suggests?"

Ali Beg's forlorn hope that she might refuse was, at once, shattered.

"I'll be charmed to do my best to entertain His Highness," Olga replied, "but if the Maharaja is a real critic, as I understood from Mr Durrant yesterday, he'll not think much of my playing. You see," she turned from her husband to the Englishman, "owing to the War I was compelled to leave off lessons when I was terribly immature and wasn't able to complete my training." Tears of disappointment welled into Olga's eyes. She brushed them away, and managed to smile, but Durrant noticed them, although he made no comment.

"Come, come," said Ali impatiently. "Olga, you really mustn't bore Mr Durrant with your reminiscences. He'll think you're fishing for compliments."

"I'm extremely grateful to your wife and look forward to the opportunity of judging of her playing for myself," said Durrant to Ali Beg, politely, hoping to pacify the irritable husband. "If half of what I've heard is true, Madame Ali Beg's genius is indeed very great, and there must be a real treat in store for me. So few English people have real musical gifts or take the art seriously."

Ali maintained a stubborn silence, but, undaunted, Durrant continued genially, "I suppose I inherit my love of music from my mother who was French. My father was English and I don't think could distinguish one note from another." Durrant was anxious to show Olga his

affection for her beloved art as, by this means, he hoped to lay foundations of friendship with her.

Accompanied by the Captain, the Raja now joined the group into which he was deferentially admitted.

The Captain made the necessary introductions. "Permit me to present to Your Highness Dr. and Mrs. Syed Ali Beg."

"I'm very pleased to meet you both," said the Raja condescendingly. Then addressing Ali, he remarked, "I understand you hail from Bengal."

"That's so, Your Highness," and Ali Beg mentioned the name of his home town.

"You're a long way from my State which, I suppose, you've not visited."

"I'm afraid not, Your Highness, but a friend of mine, who's an engineer, was recently in your service. Perhaps Your Highness may remember him, his name's Abdul Razaak."

"I remember him perfectly," the Raja replied. "He was assistant engineer to Mr Rayner, whose services were lent to me recently by the British Government for road construction. Mr Rayner and your friend did excellent work, and I hope to see them both again in Ghanapur, should I sanction further engineering schemes. But such projects are of no interest to the present company."

During the Raja's remarks, Olga had leisure in which to study Durrant's appearance. He was of medium height, about thirty-five years of age, had dark hair and was clean shaven. He was slim and well dressed and looked a soldier. She ascertained later that he had been an officer during the Great War, and after demobilization had been a courier in a tourist agency in Cairo, from which he had drifted recently into the Maharaja's service.

The Maharaja turned to Olga. "I understand you're a magnificent pianist, and I hope to have the great pleasure of hearing you perform."

"Your Highness is very kind," said Olga, dropping a curtsy, such as Freda had taught her to make in the presence of the Grand Duke of Grafburg. "I'm afraid that the accounts of my pianoforte work are very flattering and that you'll be sadly disappointed."

"Never fear," said the ruler kindly, charmed by Olga's deference and curtsy, especially the curtsy. "I intend to be one of your audience this afternoon for it's a great pleasure to me to hear good European music."

"Thank you, Your Highness," and Olga curtsied once more.

"*Au revoir* then till three o'clock this afternoon."

When Durrant was closeted with the Maharaja in the Ruler's *de luxe* suite, he remarked, "Mrs Ali Beg's a very pretty and charming girl."

"I agree," assented the ruler. "She seems to be very talented besides. However, I don't think much of her husband. He's far too gross and surly to possess so attractive a wife."

"It has occurred to me Your Highness that it might be worth while to cultivate the acquaintance of Mrs. Ali Beg. Your Highness might care some day to invite her to your State, where she could entertain you with her music."

"That's a good idea, Durrant," replied the Prince, pleased at the thought of introducing any new diversion into his State where he was often bored. "I'd be glad if you'd favour Mrs. Ali Beg with your attentions. You could ascertain whether she and her husband are likely to be well disposed towards me, for it'd be too conspicuous if I made advances to her on board ship."

"I understand perfectly, Your Highness," said Durrant enchanted at the ruler's ready acquiescence.

The news that Olga's recital was to be patronized by the Maharaja of Ghanapur induced many people to sacrifice their after-lunch siestas that first afternoon in the Red Sea. Olga always played from memory and, on this occasion, more brilliantly than ever.

"What a tragedy that a talented girl like Mrs Ali Beg has made a mixed marriage!" was the general comment among the passengers, some of whom pronounced this opinion so loudly that it was overheard by Ali Beg. The Raja complimented Olga upon her performance, and Ali Beg upon the possession of so gifted a wife. The sincerest congratulations were offered by an American and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. West, who had joined the *Shah Jahan* at Port Said. They were on a round-the-world tour, which included India, and were much interested in Olga. When the audience had dispersed, they introduced themselves and spoke to Ali Beg and his wife with great friendliness.

"We'd a daughter about your age," said Mr. West, drawing Olga aside. "She was killed in a motor accident last June, and I've induced Mrs. West to make this world-tour in the hope that her attention may be diverted from the tragedy. You're so like our dear child Barbara that Mrs. West's grief has been revived."

"I'm awfully sorry to have saddened your wife," said Olga sympathetically. "Can I do anything for her?"

Mrs. West turned a tear-stained face towards Olga. "I see Fred has told you about our dear Barbara. Honey, you're so like her! Sit down by me child for a minute. I guess I'll be all right in a few minutes."

Olga obeyed and presently Mrs. West placed her arms about the girl's neck and held her in close embrace. Meanwhile, Mr. West and Ali talked commonplaces at a distance. When Mrs. West had sufficiently recovered, her husband led her to her deck-chair. As the couple left the music saloon, Durrant, who had been waiting his opportunity, entered by the opposite door."

"Allow me to add my congratulations to those you've already received," he said.

"You're all too generous," Olga replied.

"Not at all. You've the genius of the real artiste, I

mean the artiste who's born, not made. Now I wonder whether you'd do me a great kindness?"

"Certainly," replied Olga. As Ali Beg coughed, she added guardedly, "That is, of course, if I can."

"Would you be good enough to play my accompaniments? I used to sing once, tenor songs, and I'd like to practise with you if it wouldn't bore you too much."

"I'll be delighted," replied Olga, relieved that Durrant's request was connected with music, the one domain in which, despite her marriage, she would brook no interference from Ali. "Why not run through the songs now, while the saloon's empty?"

"It's awfully kind of you and I'll take you at your word," said Durrant. He hurried to his cabin and presently returned with a bound volume that opened at *Vesti la Giubba* from *Pagliacci*.

Olga was that rare combination, as fine an accompanist as soloist, and with her sympathetic support, Durrant gave an excellent rendering of Canio's impassioned lament. In his youth, Durrant had actually sung in grand opera in a touring company in France and his trained voice had been in demand at camp concerts during the War. Again the music room resounded with applause.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Olga, clapping hard, "You can't think what a joy it is to me to hear fine singing. It transports me back to the happiest time of my life, my student days in Grafburg."

Ali Beg fumed as he heard her mention the happiest time of her life as a thing of the past. Before he could interpose, admirers had crowded round both Olga and Durrant begging for encores.

As Durrant had foreseen, through the bond of music, he and Olga became firm friends. The girl had not forgotten Vronsky's remarks to the Maharaja's private secretary, which she had overheard just before the

impresario disembarked at Port Tewfik. She argued to herself that, if Vronsky considered Durrant to be in a position to secure him influential patrons, there was no reason why Durrant should not also introduce her to wealthy supporters, who would assist Petrovka, the pianist, when she made her professional début in India. Olga was gratified by Durrant's admiration of her playing, practised with him at odd hours, and insisted upon his singing at all her afternoon recitals.

To facilitate his friendship with Olga, Durrant did his best to cultivate intimacy with Ali Beg, but his efforts in this direction were futile. Because of his wife's new friends, Ali Beg became even more morose. For an Indian who had resided long in Europe, Ali Beg was extraordinarily gauche, and unlike most Muhammadans, who are keen sportsmen, he did not take the slightest interest in games. He was ridiculously self conscious, and was annoyed at his lack of proficiency in deck sports, to which his recent accident contributed. Finally, he refused to play, and assumed the rôle of scowling spectator, alert for any act or gesture suggestive, even remotely, of impropriety.

The day before Aden there was a small incident symptomatic of Ali's tense condition. A homeward-bound liner passed close to the *Shah Jahan* and the passengers flocked to the decks to wave and cheer. Carter, Olga's principal subaltern adorer, lent her his heavy prism binoculars, and while she held them to her eyes he adjusted the focusing screws. Of necessity, this action brought the lad's body in contact with Olga's, and Ali Beg considering this an unwarranted familiarity, angrily snatched the glasses from Olga's hands. "When my wife needs glasses, she can use mine," he snarled, his eyes flashing.

The passengers, and there were many, who witnessed Ali Beg's outburst of temper, were astonished, and all sympathized with Olga who, ashamed of her husband,

retired to her cabin. Thither Ali followed to find the door locked against him.

"Olga," cried Ali, "let me in. I'm sorry I lost my temper."

Fearful of further scenes, she opened the door. Then, after Ali had entered, she rebolted it and faced him. When her husband attempted to kiss her, she repelled him. "I'll stand your absurd treatment no longer," she said. Her voice was cold and resolute as on the night when Ludwig had raged over Ali's gift. "If you repeat your idiotic behaviour of this morning, I'll leave you altogether. I'm not your slave because I was fool enough to marry you. If you've any gentlemanly instinct, you'll apologize to Mr. Carter for your insufferable rudeness."

"Olga, I'm sorry. I can't say more," Ali stammered. "It's only because I love you so much that I hate seeing you familiar with the men on board. There's that fellow Durrant, who's at your side day and night, and if he's compelled to absent himself on account of his duties to the Maharaja, Carter, or some other young officer, takes his place. I don't know what has come to you." Despite his efforts to remain calm, Ali relapsed into nasal stridency such as is peculiar to the middle and lower class Indian when excited. He continued in a shrill crescendo, "Nowadays you hardly ever condescend to sit quietly with your husband. Indeed, it seems to me that you shun his society."

"That's because ever since we came on board you've been so unbearably disagreeable. I tell you I won't put up with your petulance. If this is your treatment during the first days of our marriage, God knows what it'll be like when we're in India." Olga unfastened and opened the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To see Mrs. West if you must know. I suppose you don't object to that."

"Olga," Ali cried. "Please wait here. I'm really sorry for what has occurred."

Olga seated herself on the lower bunk. "Well, perhaps we'd better have this out once and for all," she said wearily. "When I married you, I thought you realized that I'd never submit to be treated as a slave. Unfortunately I was mistaken. If I even speak to another man you behave as though I were unfaithful. That's a ridiculous attitude and I'll never tolerate it."

Ali was surprised at Olga's boldness. "Give me another chance," he pleaded. "You can't think how humiliated I'll feel if you confide in the Wests or in other passengers. I was wrong, I admit it, but I repeat that it's only my love for you that drove me to act as I did. If you only showed a little consideration for me, disputes such as this would never arise."

"Then you'll apologize to Mr. Carter?"

"Olga, I can't; he was cuddling you."

"Rubbish. He wasn't. There isn't even that excuse to justify your rudeness to him."

The gong sounded for lunch.

"Just one more word," said Olga, "before we go to the dining-room. Do you intend to drop your foolish suspicions and be amiable and behave normally or not; yes or no?"

"Yes," replied Ali anxious for a respite.

"Right, I'll take you at your word. If you stick to it, more disputes such as this won't arise."

They entered the dining-saloon. Ali with a sullen expression that had become habitual, Olga with a watery smile. That afternoon there was a fresh soulfulness in her playing. In her art alone did she find consolation. When she had concluded Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* she felt purified from the froth of worldiness that was smirching her ideals. She yearned to devote her whole life to her music, to be free from human contacts, duties, interests that brought her worst characteristics into play.

She felt abased that in her struggle between good and evil, between her duty to her husband and to herself as an artiste, of daily occurrence since she left Marseilles, her increasing detestation of her rôle as Ali Beg's wife triumphed.

The night after Aden had been selected for the fancy dress ball. The Raja promised to give prizes for the best costumes which would be worn at the Captain's dinner before the dance.

Olga and the other pierrettes were very dainty. As they emerged from their cabins, their admirers attached to their skirts labels bearing the names of the various drinks they were supposed to represent. Though she dreaded the comments of her spouse, Olga did not like to protest when she found that her designation was *Black and White Whisky*, selected because of the black trimmings on her white frock. The other girls were *Starboard Light* or *Crème de Menthe* in green; *Cherry Brandy* in red; *Pink Gin* or *Gin and Angostura* in pink; *Bubbly* in yellow and *Shah Jahan Cocktail* in jazz. All the girls had discarded stockings, and Ali Beg, who had dressed first, and was not in fancy costume, remonstrated with Olga as soon as he caught sight of her. He disapproved of her bare legs and her bodice held in place by slender shoulderstraps.

"My frock is just like the dresses of the other pierrettes," Olga said. "You know, Ali, it's awfully bourgeois and also shows a nasty mind to be shocked at bare legs and shoulders." Her reply further incensed her husband, who next took great exception to Olga's title *Black and White*, which he considered a taunt directed against himself. In consequence, he had a fit of the sulks which lasted the whole evening.

When all were seated in the dining-room, stewards appeared with trays of cocktails, and word was passed round that these had been provided by the Raja. Compounded specially for the occasion, the mixture was at

once christened the *Ghanapur Cocktail* and the principal ingredient being Cointreau, it had a kick as the merry-makers found while drinking to the Raja and each other.

There was much laughter at some of the burlesque costumes and the funniest effort was a suburban wedding party. The bride, a subaltern, attired in white, complete with orange blossoms and veil, clasped an impossible bouquet composed, principally, of dilapidated artificial flowers discarded from the table vases. The bridegroom was a tall girl who, in her borrowed frock-coat, striped trousers and top-hat, looked a cross between a white slave trafficker and a churchwarden. The father of the bride and the mother of the bridegroom were as early-Victorian in appearance as the resources of the passengers' wardrobes permitted. The bridesmaids and pages were two subalterns and two girls, the former being dressed in short muslin frocks with frilled underwear, the latter in silk shirts and satin knickers. Before the dancing commenced the wedding party posed for a group photograph. Durrant, who had appeared in ordinary evening dress at dinner, was disguised as the shabby-genteel photographer. The passengers roared with laughter as he issued his instructions, telling the members of the wedding group how to sit, to stand, to smile. Durrant was a convincing actor, and played the part of the upstart cockney so well that none of the passengers recognized him, until he pulled off his yellow wig and moustache. Because he was keen on theatricals, Durrant never travelled without a well-stocked make-up box. This, coupled with Durrant's skill, had been much in demand by the passengers. Indeed, the success of many of the impersonations was due to Durrant's assistance.

During the interval between dances six and seven, Olga was sitting with her partner, Carter, in the music saloon, in a cushioned alcove, designed for one person only. Olga and Carter, therefore, were in close proximity and, in this situation, were found by Ali Beg,

who had been spying on them unobserved. Furiously angry, the Indian pulled Olga roughly away, and then favoured Carter with a torrent of filthy abuse in Hindustani, which the lad, an officer in an Indian regiment, understood. Fortunately, there were no onlookers and dance number seven having commenced, Olga, claimed, just in the nick of time, by Durrant, her partner, disappeared.

Dancing continued until two a.m. when a halt was called and the Captain informed the company that there would be a parade in front of the Maharaja, who would then award the prizes. A seat for the Prince having been arranged, the couples, in the dance which had been interrupted, walked slowly round the deck bowing to the Raja as they passed. Two perambulations were made, and then the Captain, after a pretended discussion with the Raja, stated that, as their munificent patron was quite unable to decide which costume was best, he had resolved, like the Dodo in *Alice in Wonderland*, to give prizes to everyone. This announcement was received with cheers, which were redoubled when the Prince proceeded to distribute practically the entire contents of the ship's fancy store. He made special presents to Olga and Durrant, in recognition of the musical treats they had afforded their fellow passengers during the voyage. To Olga he presented a gold-enamelled brooch, bearing the P. and O. crest, and the motto *Quis Separabit*, and to Durrant a pair of gold enamelled sleeve-links with the same motto.

The evening terminated with *For he's a jolly good Fellow*, in honour of the Raja, *Auld Lang Syne*, and the National Anthem.

Olga was somewhat apprehensive of the forthcoming interview with her husband and her fears were justified. Directly she entered the cabin, Ali Beg, who had preceded her, angrily demanded an explanation of her wanton conduct with Carter.

"I've nothing to explain," said Olga simply, "neither Carter nor I were doing anything wrong."

"You dare say that to my face, you whore!" Ali shouted in wrath.

"You dare say that again," retorted Olga, "and I'll have nothing more to do with you."

"I'll say it as often as I damn well please, you bloody whore!" answered Ali Beg with rising passion and voice. Then his eyes fell on the Raja's brooch, which he had not seen presented, and which produced the same effect on him as his garnet pendant produced on Ludwig, in Tannenkop. "I suppose your lover gave you that." Ali attempted to tear the brooch from Olga's frock.

Olga put up her hands for protection and Ali Beg, beside himself with rage, struck her violently and then, seizing her wrists, twisted them, making her yell with pain.

"Let me go," she screamed, "let me go."

Attracted by her cries, passengers from adjacent cabins rushed to the door, which, not being bolted, was flung open. Olga, in a fainting condition, was cowering on the floor. Mrs. West, who was among the helpers, quickly threw her shawl about the weeping girl, whom she led to her own cabin, while the Captain, who had been summoned hastily, arrived on the scene with the ship's doctor. The Captain quickly appraised the situation. He threatened Ali Beg with imprisonment in the fo'c'sle, should the Indian repeat the offence of wife-beating on board the *Shah Jahan*, while Olga he placed in a vacant cabin with a burly sailor on guard so that she could not be molested.

News of the occurrence spread like wildfire and everybody on board, even the *burra-memsahibs*, who had snubbed the girl during the voyage, sympathized with Olga.

Next morning, when Ali Beg appeared on deck, he

was shunned. To escape observation, he moved to the draughty side of the deck, which was deserted, and unthinkingly seated himself beneath a window of the *de luxe* suite occupied by the Maharaja of Ghanapur. Suddenly Ali recognized the voices of the Raja and the Captain.

"I'm sure Ali Beg'd never listen to me," the Raja was saying, "For one thing he's Muslim and I'm Hindu, and, although we're both more or less denationalized, I admit, he'd seriously resent the interference of a Hindu in his private affairs. If you want to effect a reconciliation between husband and wife, why not try yourself?"

"That's not part of my duty," replied the other. "Nor between ourselves, would I advise the girl to go back to her husband. He really had no provocation, yet he was heard to call his wife a whore, and——"

"You were going to mention your detestation of mixed marriages?"

"I was Your Highness."

"Don't mind me," said the Maharaja sadly, thinking of a love tragedy of his own. "The mixed marriage is doomed to failure owing to both English and Indian prejudice. This girl, if she remains with her husband, is bound to lead a life of misery. She'll be shunned by her own kind in India, and loathed by her new relations. If Ali Beg was a decent sort, I might advise an attempt at reconciliation, but the man's a brute and I'm ashamed of my compatriot."

"Do you think it might help if I were to ask the padre in the second-class to talk to them?"

"Personally I don't," said the Maharaja. "However, you know best. I suggest, though, if you do decide to call in the padre, that he should be asked to exercise his powers of persuasion on the lady first. After all, she must consent to return to her husband. He, no doubt, would be willing to take her back if she were willing to go. By the way, where's the poor girl now?"

"With Mrs. Fred West, who seems very much attached to Mrs. Ali Beg."

"She couldn't be in better hands," said the ruler. "Better let husband and wife remain apart a day or two. Maybe they'll cool down if given a chance." As the Captain made no comment, the Prince continued, "But candidly, do you think it safe to leave the fellow at large? He's so awfully violent that he's capable of knifing his wife if opportunity occurs."

"You're right, Your Highness," said the Captain reflectively. "I'll confine Ali Beg in the fo'c'sle until we reach Bombay."

"That'd be a wise precaution and one I feel sure you wouldn't regret. A cur like Ali Beg isn't fit to be at large. I wonder——" the Raja paused. "Hark! What was that?" he said, suddenly on the alert.

As though in answer to the Maharaja's question came the cry from the deck, "Man overboard."

To escape the humiliation of confinement in the fo'c'sle and the scandal that would ensue when he reached India, Ali Beg had thrown himself into the sea.

Almost automatically, the liner turned to port, the while lifebuoys were flung overboard. The ship described a complete circle, and while this evolution was in progress a lifeboat, fully manned, was lowered from the davits, ready to be cast adrift when the circle had been completed. There was a general rush to the decks, the passengers taking the keenest interest in the tragic sequel to the gaiety of the previous night. The great circle made by the *Shah Jahan* could be traced from the ship's wake, and the ring of lifebelts bobbing in the choppy sea. On return to the point near which Ali Beg had flung himself overboard, the small boat dropped with a smack into the water, and in a few minutes was well astern, for the *Shan Jahan* did not come to rest for about a quarter-of-a-mile. Then the engines were reversed, and the lifeboat was again within hail of the bridge from

which a careful look-out was maintained. Ali Beg, however, never reappeared, and after a fruitless search of an hour's duration, the boat returned with the lifebuoys, and the *Shah Jahan* resumed her voyage to Bombay.

So unpopular had been Ali Beg, that he was regretted by nobody. Indeed, the consensus of opinion was that, provided there was no little Ali Beg in the making, Dr. Syed Ali Beg was well out of the way.

The news was broken to Olga by Mrs. West who constituted herself the girl's guardian. After the kindly American had ascertained that there was no likelihood of maternal complications, she and her husband persuaded Olga to travel with them as a paid secretary-companion.

Olga's release from matrimony delighted Durrant. When he heard that she was to tour India, he hinted to the Maharaja that Olga might prove a very attractive mistress for an Indian prince, and suggested that His Highness should invite the Wests and Olga to Ghanapur. The Maharaja warmly approved of the proposal.

Never having been to the Maharaja's palace, Durrant could not describe it, but had recourse to Krishnamurti. The Personal Minister having seen very little of the world honestly thought that no state boasted a more magnificent royal residence than Ghanapur, and fanned the curiosity of Mrs West and Olga into a flame of desire to view its wonders. Therefore the Americans accepted the Maharaja's invitation with alacrity. It was arranged that the ruler would select a date as soon as he knew when he would be free from political business and at liberty to accord them a right royal welcome.

As her fellow passengers were convinced of Olga's innocence, they gave proof of their sympathy by a subscription for her benefit, and the Maharaja headed the list of the donors.

Fortunately for Olga, she possessed her own passport and, therefore, had no difficulty in landing in India as the widow of Dr. Syed Ali Beg, formerly Olga Petermann,

When the *Shah Jahan* reached Bombay, Olga and the Wests were escorted by the American Express representative to the Taj Mahal Hotel, while Ali Beg's effects were handed by the purser to an agent, for transmission to the doctor's parents in Bengal.

CHAPTER XIV

CUT-GLASS

ON his return to Ghanapur, the Maharaja found himself in a financial quagmire from which rescue seemed impossible. When from Simla's heights "Halt!" had been called to his travels, his expenses in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria alone, had eaten up all the funds earmarked, prior to his departure, for much needed public works.

The Government of India had approved of the appointment of Mr John Durrant as private secretary, only on the condition that the employment of the Englishman resulted in economies sufficient to ensure balanced budgets and liquidated debts. The Maharaja feared that if he could not produce a sum of £50,000, with which to pay his most pressing creditors, his State would be placed in the hands of an administrator, and he would be in the ignominious position of a temporarily deposed ruler. Consequently, much against the grain, for he hated to admit that his wealth was not inexhaustible, the Maharaja was compelled to take Durrant into his confidence and to admit that he had ordered luxuries by the ton and paid by the scruple. He explained to the Englishman that the action of the Government of India was due to the application made to the India Office by his London creditors, after their repeated dunning of the Ghanapur State Council had been ignored.

Durrant was servile, sympathetic, suggestive. To prove that he had not placed his feet higher than his capacity, Durrant proposed that the Maharaja should sell some of the jewels of which His Highness was wont to boast. The ruler was exceedingly loath to part with any of the treasures which, so he considered, contributed

greatly to his prestige. However, impelled by the terror of forfeiting the management or mismanagement of his State, he eventually compromised, and agreed to sell, not his own, but his wife's diamonds, which had been part of her dowry. The stones were in the Maharaja's strong-room, and utmost secrecy in the transaction would be essential so that the Princess should not hear of it, and that the Maharaja might be spared the humiliation of figuring before the world as a hard-up potentate. The Maharaja did not inform Durrant that he and his wife were estranged, but of this palace gossip had already enlightened the private secretary.

Acting on Durrant's advice, the Maharaja wrote to the famous Parisian jewel merchants, Fanquiers. He inquired whether this firm, which had recently had the Maharanee's diamonds cut and polished in Amsterdam, would be prepared to purchase the necklace of nineteen brilliants, and the two bracelets of eleven diamonds each. In their reply Fanquiers stated that they would be unable to offer more than a nominal price of £30,000. Because the jewellers were creditors of the Maharaja, however, and saw no prospect of their bill being settled unless the stones were sold, they agreed to seek a purchaser who would pay a higher figure, admitting that if there were a demand the ornaments would be worth at least three times what they could offer. At Durrant's suggestion, the Maharaja then wrote a confidential letter to Boris Vronsky, asking whether the impresario could find a buyer amongst his wealthy and influential patrons. The Maharaja quoted the price of £75,000, but inserted a separate, secret slip to the effect that, as he was in a very great hurry for the money, he would accept £55,000 for a quick sale, if no better offer were forthcoming. The Prince reckoned that the five thousand pounds over and above the £50,000 required to settle his most urgent debts, should cover the expenses connected with the sale.

The middle of March was selected by the Maharaja for the Wests' visit to Ghanapur, and by the commencement of that month arrangements had been made for Durrant to leave India secretly for Europe with the stones, as soon as Vronsky cabled that he had found a purchaser. As a protection, Durrant would be accompanied by a private agent, supplied by the firm recommended by Vronsky for insurance of the gems during their transit to Europe. No word of Durrant's hush-hush trip was to reach either the Wests or Olga, and during their stay the ruler determined to make as lavish a display of wealth as he had done on the *Shah Jahan*. Moreover, because of his ulterior motives with regard to Olga, the Prince resolved that the Wests' purview of Ghanapur should be judiciously blinkered. With the skill of a professional window-dresser, he embellished those aspects of his State which he selected for their inspection, and took precautions that not a single ray of light should penetrate to the corruption and disorder beneath the veneer of culture.

Mr. and Mrs. West and Olga experienced a feeling of disappointment as the train slackened, before drawing-up at Kotibagh, the nearest station to Ghanapur City. Everything was dusty and dirty, and the few buildings they noticed were mud huts plastered with cow dung and hung with dirty sacking. The Americans and Olga were the only first-class passengers, and it was some time before they could descend from their compartment, so great the platform jam of third-class travellers, who carried all their worldly goods on their heads, their backs and about their waists. Eventually, a vacant space was cleared by two men, dressed, like the Maharaja's servants on board ship, in the Ghanapur livery—rose pink turban of filmy muslin and chocolate coloured *sherwani*.¹ This costume was supplemented by white trousers fitting so tightly, that Olga decided that these garments must be sewn on to the wearers' legs. From beneath the trousers

¹ Long-skirted coat.

protruded patent leather pumps, encasing the largest and flattest feet she had ever seen.

"I'm Moti Lal, one of His Highness's A.D.C.s, and this is Sham Lal, my assistant," shouted the elder and stouter of the two men in jerky English accentuating the wrong syllables.

The younger A.D.C., accompanied by a bevy of the Maharaja's servants, as dirty and ragged as coolies, supervised the transport of the luggage, which process necessitated much screaming, abuse and salacious invective. Meanwhile the visitors were shown to a scarlet, saloon-bodied car, all four doors of which bore the Ghanapur coat of arms. Mr. West who, at one time, had been in the motor trade, commented in whispers upon the defective maintenance of the conveyance and of a motor lorry, tied up with string which, so Moti Lal informed them, would take their luggage to the palace. About two miles from the station there was a hut, from which emerged a sentinel, whose apparel consisted of a dirty shirt worn over a dirtier loin cloth and a filthy towel bound round his head in lieu of turban.

"This is our customs officer," explained Moti Lal. "We've now left British India and are in Ghanapur State."

The road was good but the travellers were horrified at the poverty of the mud hut villages and at the numerous beggars, leprous and sore-smitten. At the twenty-second milestone Ghanapur City was reached. The Maharaja's capital was remote from any town in British India and had been but little influenced by Western contacts. It was picturesque, but there were open sewers on either side of the main street. The shops, shaped like open boxes standing on their sides, were filled with the usual bazaar junk—brass pots, bright-hued cotton material, highly coloured prints of gods and goddesses, glass bangles, gold and silver jewellery. Piles of viscid sweetmeats swarmed with flies and, as the

car had often to halt for bullock carts to pass, the motorists had many whiffs of odours, both pungent and sickening. The bright hues of the women's drapery, the clank of their silver ornaments, their coy glances, their upright bearing, as they walked with swaying hips, carrying heavy loads on their heads, delighted Mrs. West and Olga. Mr. West, more practical and less romantic than his companions, grunted disapproval of the stench, and frankly declared that he failed to see anything beautiful about naked babies playing in refuse heaps, women searching for lice in their neighbours' hair, men answering the calls of nature by the roadside.

About two miles beyond the city Moti Lal pointed out a group of bungalows, stating that Colonel Darcy *Sahib* had formerly lived in one of them, and that they were now unoccupied guest houses. Mr. West was much impressed by the skilful manner in which the engineers had constructed the road, which, though tortuous, and in places very steep, rendered access relatively easy to the Maharaja's residence that occupied the site of an old fort on the summit of a hill.

"What's the purpose of those white stones?" said Olga, when the car reached a particularly serpentine bend of the road, where bank and cutting alternated.

"This is called the *Samp* or Snake, because of the curves," replied Moti Lal, gesticulating violently in his endeavour to make himself clear. "The Maharaja *Sahib* nearly had a bad accident here some months back, and so he ordered that the edges of the road should be defined with white stones. The stones are shown up at night by the headlights of a car, and serve as a guide to the driver." Farther on, close to the palace entrance, Moti Lal directed attention to the old cart road, from the palace to the city, now used only by pedestrians.

The guard presented arms as the car rolled through the outermost gateway, with the remains of two immense wooden doors, bristling with huge iron spikes, intended

originally to withstand the charge of elephants. At one side, dilapidated like the other buildings, was a temple, in and out of which there strayed the sacred cows that, in Hindu cities, take precedence in all traffic. The enormous State elephants, streaked with red and yellow paint, delighted Olga as though she were a child, and the burble of camels, with dust upon their sullen eyebrows, spoke to her of the desert places of the world.

Again the car passed through a gateway, again the sentries presented arms, the visitors observing that the immediate vicinity of the palace was clean and tidy. Upon arrival under a massive porch they descended, and were delivered into the care of an imposing individual, whose chocolate-coloured livery was heavily embroidered in gold, and who carried a poignard in the broad pink silk cummerbund¹ encircling his portly waist. This was Ram Lal, butler-in-chief and one of the Maharaja's most confidential servants. With solemn mien the retainer led the strangers across the hall decorated with stuffed tigers, panthers and other shooting trophies, into a drawing-room where His Highness rose to greet them. It was the first time that the Wests and Olga had seen the Maharaja in Indian dress, and they were amazed, and somewhat awed at the splendour of his appearance. A *sherwani* of cloth of gold, fastened with diamond buttons, a turban of red and gold tissue, adorned with a magnificent pearl and diamond aigrette, gold embroidered slippers and close fitting white trousers enhanced the dignity of the forty years old ruler, to whom Indian was much more becoming than European dress. In his ears blazed two large solitaire diamonds and his slender fingers were adorned with magnificent rings. Ropes of pearls reached from his neck to his waist and his wrists were encircled with pearl and diamond bracelets. Anxious to impress Olga favourably from the outset, the Prince had debated with

¹ Waist sash.

himself, and with Durrant, at considerable length, before appearing in this elaborate costume, more suited to an official reception than to a quiet house-party. Had his guests been English residents in India, the Maharaja would never have worn it for fear of exciting ridicule. To Olga and her companions he excused himself by explaining jokingly that he had only donned his "war-paint," as he called it, to give his travel companions the right royal welcome he had promised.

Owing to the sudden failure of one of the companies of which Mr. West was chairman, the Americans were compelled to return to New York from Ghanapur. Olga and they had realized that there was no opening for a concert artiste in India, and that the thirst for Western music, described by Ali Beg, had been a figment of that facile liar's imagination. Consequently, being now unable to offer Olga permanent employment, as they had intended, the Wests meant to consult the Maharaja about her future. On board the *Shah Jahan* Olga had learnt from Durrant that the Maharaja bore an English title, in addition to his high-sounding Indian names, and she had gathered that he had many influential friends in various European capitals, who might, she thought, be very useful to her, now that she was free to tour in any part of the world. Should the Maharaja declare himself unable to assist Olga to become Petrovka, then the Wests would retain her in their service until they reached Marseilles. From that port she would return to Tannenkop, for in his letter of condolence, and ill-concealed delight at the death of Ali Beg, Ludwig had informed Olga that her position as entertainer in the inn was still open for her.

Olga's joy was unbounded when the Maharaja conducted his guests to the visitors' wing of the palace, and she found in her sitting-room a Blüthner grand piano. Upon the instrument lay a garland of red and golden braid attached to which was the Raja's visiting card

bearing the words, "In honour of the arrival of a great pianist." According to the Indian custom of greeting distinguished guests, the Prince placed the garland round Olga remarking with great friendliness and charm, "I hope you'll play whenever you feel inclined. You'll disturb nobody, for Mr. and Mrs. West's rooms are on the far side of the roof terrace. There's no one in this wing beside yourself and the Indian servants who'll look after you, and they could sleep through a bombardment."

During this little speech, a fair skinned lad entered. Bowing to the ground, he stood with bent head, and hands clasped, in token of submission.

"Excuse me one moment while I speak to my A.D.C.," said the Maharaja.

The lad whispered some words in Persian which, of course, neither the Wests nor Olga could understand.

At the Maharaja's suggestion, the Wests then strolled across the roof garden to their apartments where, after garlanding them, the ruler withdrew in order, so he said, to attend to an urgent affair of State.

As she was aching to try the piano, Olga went to her sitting-room, while the Wests commenced to supervise their unpacking. To her delight, she found the instrument in tune.

While she was playing some opening chords, Durrant entered. "Welcome to Ghanapur," he said. "How good it is to see you again!" and he shook Olga warmly by the hand. "I'm terribly sorry not to have been at Kotibagh to meet you this morning, as I intended, but some cables arrived, just as I was starting for the station, and I had to remain behind to decode them. I'm looking forward immensely to your playing, and to resuming our talks that I so much enjoyed on board ship."

"You'll have to sing, too."

"I'll do so with pleasure now that I've so inspiring an accompanist."

Durrant then informed Olga that the Maharaja had had the Blüthner specially removed from the drawing-room to her sitting-room, and had sent to Bombay for a tuner and repairer to overhaul the instrument thoroughly for her benefit.

"The piano's in excellent order and it's perfectly ripping to be able to practise whenever I feel inclined, without first having to think whether I'm disturbing people," Olga remarked.

"I wish I could stay and listen to you now. I'd have asked you to play all my favourites, but I've to accompany His Highness this morning. However, I hope that during your visit we'll have many opportunities of music-making together." So saying Durrant pressed Olga's fingers affectionately and left her.

Olga wondered what Durrant's feeling towards her really was, for she was much attracted by him. At the moment, however, the piano banished all else from her mind and she started upon scales and exercises.

Soon Olga was interrupted by Mrs. West, who was laughing until the tears streamed down her face. "Honey, come along to our rooms right now. You'll be tickled to death."

Reluctantly Olga rose from the piano.

"Put on your sun topee¹ for the sun's pouring down like hell on the roof piazza."

As she entered the Wests' sitting-room, Olga gasped. Every article of furniture was of cut-glass, and the chairs and sofa were upholstered in crimson plush.

"How truly awful!" Olga remarked. "Where in the world will you sit? It's a good thing that neither of you are fat, otherwise you'd get through an awful lot of chairs."

"Oh, they're solid enough, a darn sight too solid I guess. The blasted things are as hard as bricks," said Mr. West, rubbing his posterior with a wry smile. "I'll

¹Sun-helmet.

need a course of embrocation if I sit on 'em much longer."

"Tell your bearer, Kasim, to take some of the basket chairs from my veranda. Abdul, my 'boy,' 'll help him carry them."

"Well, if you can spare them, I'll be real grateful, Honey," said Mrs. West.

"Of course I can, also the cushions, as many as you want. I believe I saw a rocking-chair too in my room. Tell the 'boys' to bring that as well."

"Why, Honey, that'll be swell. Just one easy chair for Pa and the rocker for me. I guess it'll be good and home-like to see a rocker again."

"That Raja chap may be pretty darn nice," remarked Mr. West, "but I guess he doesn't know anything about comfort. Your chairs, Olga, especially the rocker, sound kind o'good to me too." He turned to his wife, "Best take Olga into our bedroom while those nigger boys are fetching the chairs then. I'll keep watch and see they don't come nosing around. I'll be real glad to have Olga's opinion of our elegant apartment."

"You'll find the things in there the cutest you ever saw, you sure will. You'll fall for 'em Honey. I'm telling you," said Mrs. West with mock solemnity. She led the way through a curtained doorway into the sleeping chamber.

Side by side stood two glass-legged bedsteads covered with red damask counterpanes. Between the beds was a narrow aisle, at the head of which was a cupboard, also of cut-glass, with mirrored doors. So unique was this piece of furniture that, forgetting her usual pudency, Mrs. West opened it with mock pomposity, and revealed two bedroom fittings which resembled enormous cut-glass breakfast cups.

Olga shook with laughter, while Mrs. West collapsed hysterically on the bed, and her husband, grinning wickedly, put his head between the curtains of the doorway to participate in the mirth.

To do the Maharaja justice, he loathed the cut-glass furniture, Venetian chandeliers trimmed with glass grapes, and other hideosities purchased by his grandfather and father from importers in Bombay. After spending vast sums, and incurring yet vaster debts upon the embellishment and furnishing of his own luxury suite, his credit had not been sufficiently sound for him to replace the appalling decorations in the guest rooms with things of beauty, such as his Western education had taught him to love.

As the bearers returned with the furniture from Olga's rooms, they handed their employers large and imposing cream-laid envelopes, bearing the Ghanapur coat of arms stamped in crimson and royal blue. Mrs. West opened her envelope immediately, and drew forth an emblazoned card. "My!" said Mrs. West, as she read aloud, "Programme of Events in honour of the Visit of Mr. and Mrs. Fred West, and Miss Olga Petermann to Shalibagh Palace, Ghanapur State." She handed the document to her husband. "Why isn't that the cutest thing? Let me have it back when you're through with it. I'll sure have a special silver frame made for it as soon as I'm back in New York."

The first item for the day of the guests' arrival was "Palace Luncheon at one-thirty p.m., to meet Mr. and Mrs. Fred West and Miss Olga Petermann." The visitors, therefore, set to work to bathe and change, for they were terrified of committing a heinous breach of etiquette by being late for their first meal in the palace of a prince.

At about twenty minutes past one, they descended into the drawing-room, but there was no sign of life. They had eaten nothing that day except some leathery toast, washed down by sloppy weak tea tasting of buffalo's milk, served at a wayside station, on a dirty tray, at six-thirty in the morning, and they felt very dejected at the apparent remoteness of a meal.

"I wish I hadn't refused that offer of cakes and coffee at

noon," said Mrs. West plaintively when an hour had elapsed.

"What in hell does that darn Raja fellow mean, by keeping us waiting like this?" said Mr. West furiously. "Now I tell you what we're going to do, girls. We're going back to our rooms, right now, and I'll shake some cocktails. We've some gin, vermouth and brandy, thank God, and there's a tin o' biscuits in the lunch basket. Those'll keep us from immediate starvation."

"But, Pa, what'll happen if the Maharaja turns up while we're away?" asked Mrs. West timidly.

"Let him. It may be darn swell to be guests in a palace, but it's just as darn unpleasant to starve in a palace as in a shanty," her husband replied testily.

At this juncture there appeared an official whom the guests had not previously seen. With gentle voice and expressionless face, he informed the Americans that His Highness, pronounced "is 'iness," would be ready for lunch at three-fifteen.

As soon as this liaison officer had withdrawn, Mr. West remarked dryly, "That guy may be speaking truth or he may be a darn liar. Anyway, we're not taking any risks, you hear girls. We've plenty o' time to get a couple of drinks each inside of us and be back on time. I mean to get a big kick out o' those cocktails, so I'm telling you."

As they left the drawing-room like conspirators, the trio observed that the corridors were now filled with idlers, who glanced disapprovingly at the guests' purposeful migration to their own rooms.

The Wests and Olga returned to the drawing-room, fortified by their refreshment, and prepared to accept with equanimity another two hours' postponement of lunch, but when they entered the apartment they found it full of Indians, all of whom wore the regulation *shervani* and turban. Durrant, the only Englishman, proceeded to present the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the

Foreign Minister, the Assistant Private Secretaries, and other officials, whose names all sounded alike to the new arrivals. Apart from Krishnamurti, who greeted the strangers as old friends, only two other members of the Maharaja's staff made any impression on the foreigners, the fair skinned lad, whom they had seen earlier in the day, and a younger boy resembling him. Durrant introduced the pair as Farid and Rashid. When they were out of hearing, he explained that they were the orphan sons of the former teacher of Persian in the Ghanapur College, and that after their father's death, the Maharaja had made himself responsible for their welfare. The lads gave Persian lessons to His Highness, who was anxious to acquire as great a proficiency in that language as he had in French.

Word having been passed round that the Maharaja was on his way, the members of his court rose from the chairs on which they had perched in great discomfort, for they were accustomed to squat on the floor. As the ruler entered, there was a vast amount of salaaming, which continued until the Prince offered his arm to Mrs. West and the company adjourned to the dining-room. There was no apology about the lateness of the lunch, as though a delay of two hours was too insignificant to require explanation. Yet, when as heir apparent, Fatehgirji had been compelled to return to Ghanapur from Paris, his punctuality had been a source of constant altercation between himself and his father.

When, as Prince Fatehgirji, Maharaj Kumar, heir apparent of Ghanapur, the Maharaja was at Eton and Cambridge, he had dreamt of improvements to his State. He had intended to set right abuses, and had fancied himself in the rôle of an Indian King Arthur. Circumstances, however, had been too strong for him. He never lost his yearning for a fair English girl, Dorothea Hornby. Olga reminded him of Dorothea, for whom he had been willing to resign his throne when, at the age

of twenty-four, handsome, and exceedingly astute, he had graduated with honours. A certain high official at the India Office, to whom the Maharaja of Ghanapur had entrusted his son, heard of Fateh's project of marriage with Dorothea in time to thwart it. Frenzied cables to and from Ghanapur, a hectic interview with the infuriated Fatehgirji, threats to stop his allowance and send him back to India by the next mail, eventually induced the Maharaj Kumar, much against the grain, to listen to reason. To distract his thoughts from his love tragedy, his mentor dispatched him on a tour round Europe, and afterwards the Prince settled down in Paris, where he remained for several years studying medicine. At the outbreak of the Great War he was obliged to return to India and to marry a princess whom he never saw till after his wedding, and whom he found positively revolting when compared with Dorothea. In 1917 Fatehgirji had succeeded to the throne, but finding that he could not make a clean sweep of the graft and other political dirt in which his State had been embedded for generations, he lost courage. Then instead of endeavouring to reduce the mess, he added to it, by giving himself up to a life of self-indulgence.

During the luncheon "to meet Mr. and Mrs. Fred West and Miss Olga Petermann," it transpired that the Maharaja had suddenly decided to sit up for a tiger that same night, word having been received that there had been a kill in the jungle about five miles from the palace. This was the news regarding "the urgent affair of State," which Farid had brought the ruler in Olga's room, and which had caused the Prince to dash off into the jungle to see about the *machans*,¹ and to forget about the "Palace Luncheon." Like most Indian banquets the feast was a many-coursed affair, a blend of European and Indian dishes, either set of which, served separately, would have constituted an appetizing and satisfying

¹ Platforms erected in the trees from which sportsmen fire at big game.

meal, but when superimposed in the same menu, defeated European digestive powers. The Maharaja paid so much attention to Olga, who was seated on his left, that the Wests were convinced they would not appeal to him in vain to assist the girl with his patronage. It was nearly five o'clock before lunch was over. As all the party were going to sit up for the tiger, and drive out to the jungle after a late dinner, the Maharaja suggested that beforehand there should be no more strenuous entertainment than examination of his jewels with Durrant as guide.

After the ruler had retired, Durrant led the way into the Maharaja's strong-room where, arranged in readiness for the exhibition, were rows of leather cases revealing magnificent rings, ear-rings, necklaces, jewelled aigrettes, bracelets, brooches and buttons, reset by Fanquiers, in addition to many lumpy, unpolished, precious stones in heavy Indian settings. Over these treasures presided four officials, each of whom had a key of one of the four padlocks of the strong-room which, consequently, could only be opened when all the custodians were present. In the centre of the apartment were glass showcases, containing scores of watches, tie-pins, cigar and cigarette cases, walking-sticks, sleeve-links, and cigarette holders, all studded with gems, while a corner cupboard with glass doors was full of gold and silver pencils, fountain pens, penknives, embossed leather note-cases, pocket-books and other trappings for a millionaire. Mrs. West and Olga were loud in their praise of the beautiful articles while, as soon as Durrant was out of earshot, Mr. West murmured to his wife, "The Maharaja must be crazy. No sane man could be so extravagant. Who but a lunatic wants a different watch and cigarette case for every day of the year?"

After the inspection of the strong-room, Mrs. West and Olga retired to their apartments, and over the sundown whisky and soda, Mr. West discussed with Durrant the

problem of Olga's future. Durrant was loud in his condolences over the American's misfortunes. While promising to intercede on Olga's behalf with the Maharaja, the Englishman pointed out the difficult and delicate nature of his task, so that West never suspected the Maharaja's designs on Olga.

Long before the last day of their fortnight's visit to Ghanapur, the Wests were bored. The engagements enumerated on the programme proved more impressive in print than in reality, and the Americans soon wearied of the society of obsequious Indian officials. Durrant explained that he was the only English resident in Ghanapur and that the Maharaja much regretted the absence of other English visitors. He referred to the departure of Colonel Darcy, for some time Commander-in-Chief of the Maharaja's forces, but omitted to mention that the Government of India had insisted upon the dismissal of this officer. Colonel Darcy had been appointed by the Maharaja on a salary of three thousand rupees per mensem, plus a free house, free servants and a State car, merely to train a couple of hundred men, whose chief duty consisted in presenting arms to the Maharaja, and acting as an escort when His Highness rode abroad.

Olga, however, was happier in Ghanapur than she had ever been since the days of her training in Grafburg. She accepted a post at three hundred rupees a month to be English teacher and companion to the Maharani, and Durrant informed her that when His Highness went to Europe, the following autumn, Olga, as a member of his staff, would have her passage paid. The girl had related the whole of her life story to Durrant, who was the intermediary in all business arrangements between herself and the Prince. The secretary assured Olga that, once in Europe, she would be relieved of her duties, and counselled her to practise regularly while in India, so that she could give her first concert in London under the patronage of the Maharaja, who would be responsible

for the sale of the tickets amongst his wealthy friends. Furthermore, Durrant hinted that when Petrovka was known to be English, and grand-daughter of the Irish musician, Paul Drayton, even the English Royal Family, desiring to encourage national talent, might honour her by being present at her *début*. Durrant also emphasized that owing to the publicity which would be bound to accrue to Petrovka, as the *dernier* musical *cri*, her mother, if alive, could not fail to hear of her.

Olga believed Durrant implicitly and daily, from seven to ten a.m., before the fierce heat of the day, she practised assiduously, adding to her repertoire new pieces, for each evening she and Durrant gave a concert for the Maharaja's entertainment, and he professed himself keen to hear fresh items by his favourite composers. Then, after bathing, Olga made her way to the Maharani's first-floor wing, to which access was only obtainable through the Maharaja's private rooms, or through a corridor opening off the central courtyard. Protected by a sun-helmet, parasol and glare-glasses, Olga would hurry across the open space separating the Princess's abode from the guest wing, and would arrive thirsty and dry-skinned, all perspiration having evaporated in the blazing sun.

The Maharani's rooms, built round the four sides of a roof courtyard, were approached by a winding staircase, and on each landing were hefty amazon guards, clad in ill-fitting male attire. They all salaamed as Olga passed, but cast mistrustful glances, for they could not understand the English girl's freedom. The Maharani could read and write her own language, an accomplishment which many *zenana* ladies cannot boast, and could talk and read English fairly easily. Yet she spent her days gossiping with her *ayahs* and scarcely ever left her own apartments. The Princess was a martyr to malaria and, in consequence, frequently unable to take her lessons. Olga's heart ached when she saw the unfortunate little Indian woman prostrate, with eyes bulging, shivering

despite the heat. Even when she was well enough to attend to her studies, the Raja's wife did not make much progress, for she was far more interested in Olga's appearance than in the knowledge that the English professor endeavoured to impart.

To Olga's surprise, when she mentioned casually to the Maharaja that, while in his wife's rooms, she usually drank two or three glasses of a cooling soft drink, called *falsa*, he implored her to desist.

"But why Maharaja *Sahib*? You always say that the more non-alcoholic drinks one takes, the more one perspires and the better it is."

"Take as many cool drinks as you like with you from my palace, but don't touch any of the concoctions made by my wife's dirty servants." Turning to Ram Lal, who always stood behind the ruler's chair at meals, the Maharaja gave orders that Olga's *ayah* was to take daily iced *falsa* to the Maharani's suite, and see that no other drink was served to Olga in the *zenana*.

At the first opportunity, Olga asked Durrant why the Maharaja was so insistent about her not drinking the Maharani's *falsa*.

"I do trust you'll fall in with H.H.'s wishes," the secretary replied. "I don't want to frighten you but don't be too sure about the Maharani's goodwill. Indian ladies have a nasty little habit of putting poison into the glasses and plates of the people they mistrust."

"But the Maharani is a sweet little thing. Besides, why should she mistrust me? She can't imagine I want to steal her husband. Of course I'll have to obey H.H. about the *falsa*, but I'll hate to offend the Princess by refusing her refreshments."

"I understand your feeling and respect you for wanting to be loyal to the Maharani," Durrant replied. "It's my duty to warn you, however, not to trust the Princess. In the Maharaja you'll find a true, disinterested and influential friend, but not in his wife."

CHAPTER XV

THE GREY PAGODA

IN the opinion of the Maharaja, the visit of the Wests had been eminently satisfactory. As soon as they left he decided to take steps to make Olga his mistress. The Prince was convinced that Olga was a good girl, and was unlikely to yield to his embraces without much preliminary schooling. If skilfully wooed, she might succumb to Durrant, of whom she seemed fond, and if Durrant succeeded in seducing Olga, then the Raja would be able to treat her as a wanton. The ruler, therefore, resolved to bribe his secretary to win Olga's affections. The Prince rightly guessed that Durrant would do anything, no matter how vile, for money, and would not hesitate to hand over his mistress to his master, in exchange for cash. It did occur to the Maharaja that, having won Olga's love, Durrant might break his compact by refusing to surrender the girl. The ruler thought, however, that even if the secretary should reciprocate Olga's passion, the threat of dismissal would compel him to complete the bargain. All facilities for love-making, therefore, should be put in Durrant's way, and the Prince decided to exceed his past generosity to Olga, by giving her valuable presents.

The Maharaja lost no time in opening his campaign. "Olga you want a new wrist watch," he remarked. "Perspiration has spoilt your ribbon strap, and your silver watch is very badly discoloured. I've a little watch here that you'll find more suited to the climate." The ruler produced from his pocket a beautiful platinum bracelet with a watch set in diamonds. "Platinum doesn't tarnish, so you'll never need to clean it, no

matter how hot you get, nor how wet the metal becomes." So saying, the Maharaja fastened the bracelet on Olga's wrist.

Fearful of giving offence by refusal, Olga accepted the gift hesitatingly, because of its value.

Durrant readily fell in with the Maharaja's scheme, and sought Olga's company whenever he and she were free. They played tennis and rode together and, at the Raja's suggestion, planned an expedition to the Grey Pagoda, which no foreigner could visit without a permit.

Had it been well advertised, this monument to Siva, the Creator and Destroyer, would have attracted visitors from all parts of the world, because of its life-size sculpture, audaciously obscene in character. The ruler hoped that the sexual suggestions conveyed by the carving would affect Olga physically and enable Durrant to attain his ends.

To see the sun rise over the pagoda, and to inspect it before the heat of the day, Durrant and Olga set off at three a.m. After bumping and rattling over a rough track for about two hours and a half, they reached the foot of the hill, crowned by the shrine, just as the dawn dyed pink its grey grandeur. As Olga gazed, she fancied she heard music played by a celestial orchestra, and determined to compose a paean to the rising sun. In the vague morning light, that left the base of the hill in shadow, the temple seemed to float above the world as though too ethereal to be chained to earth.

At the foot of the eminence, Olga and Durrant descended from the car, and the servants, who had accompanied them in a motor wagonette, started to convey to a nearby rest house, food, drinks, and empty kerosine oil tins, without which useful articles for heating bath water no Indian servant will move from headquarters.

By the time they had climbed to the terrace on which stood the cone-shaped pile, Olga was glad to rest. "I

often wondered why H.H. never arranged for the Wests to visit the pagoda, for in a book I borrowed from the Maharaja's library, it's stated to be one of the finest monuments in Asia. I suppose he was afraid that Mrs. West couldn't have managed the climb."

"Maybe that was one of the reasons which prevented H.H. from sending the Wests here," replied Durrant, "but there are others which you'll understand when we've finished our inspection. If you're rested we'd better get a move on, because we ought to finish sight-seeing, and get back to the shade of the rest house not later than nine o'clock. The weather has begun to heat up a lot lately."

As they entered the courtyard, Durrant drew Olga's attention to the carved lining of the great gateway. Row upon row of statues represented males and females in sexual union, varied by groups such as only experts in perversion could have conceived.

"We'd better examine the decoration round the exterior of the central building first," said Durrant.

The structure was girdled with life-size chiselled figures commemorating, not only the act of procreation, but many other forms of sex pleasure. The ecstatic expression of the chiselled faces, the suggested tremulous delight of the stone limbs, made Olga blush with confusion. However, Durrant's interest in the carving appeared so detached, technical and erudite, that Olga managed to regain her self-possession.

"If H.H. hadn't appreciated your mentality and artistic taste he'd never have suggested my bringing you here," Durrant remarked. "But he puts you into a very different category from the conventional fools of girls who, unable to comprehend the magnificence of the art work, would be horrified or, at least, would pretend to be horrified as a sign of respectability."

Flattered by this speech, Olga conquered her impulse to flee, and permitted Durrant to guide her from group

to group, but involuntarily she often turned aside her face, as though she had surprised human beings enjoying the delights of the nuptial couch.

Durrant next led Olga into the nave of the temple, the centre of which was occupied by a superbly carved bull, Siva's special symbol, adorned with stone chains and tassels. Beyond, on a dais, towered a huge *lingam*, or phallus, emblem of the male organ of creation. Durrant explained the significance of the *lingam* so tactfully that Olga caught his enthusiasm for the curious intermixture of mystic and materialistic threads that constitutes the web and woof of Hinduism.

As they passed from the interior into the sunlight Durrant helped Olga over some rough stones that led to a high ledge of rock. "Don't be frightened," he said, "I'm going to lift you up as though you were a little girl." Suiting his action to the word, he picked Olga up in his arms, but, before placing her on the rocky platform, he imprinted upon her mouth a long searching kiss. Then, to prepare her mind for his love-making, Durrant continued his eulogy of the carving and dwelt upon the beauty of sex-worship as conceived by the Hindus. In silence, Olga listened to his postulates. Her love for Durrant, of which she had no longer any doubt, doped her reasoning power. She, who had rejected Ludwig's devotion, she, who had married Ali Beg to further her own interests, was now disposed to become the voluntary slave of her lover; to render up to him body, soul, and spirit; to allow him to drain her affection, just as her mother, before her, had permitted Longford to squander the precious essence of a woman's love.

At the rest house Olga expended more care over her appearance than she had done on the fateful night of the fancy ball. She was reminded of this event by the sight of Durrant's sleeve-links with the motto *Quis separabit*.

"Look! I'm wearing the brooch that matches your

links," she exclaimed. "Now the motto *Quis separabit* 'Who shall separate us?' assumes a new meaning for me. From henceforth, whenever I see it, I'll think of you."

Their lunch *à deux* in the sparsely furnished rest house, with its central sitting-room, two bedrooms and lean-to bathrooms, seemed to Olga the most enjoyable meal she had ever tasted. As soon as it was over, and the servants had withdrawn to wash up and then sleep in the out-houses till sundown, Durrant suggested that Olga and he should rest in his bedroom, the coolest apartment in the building. She watched him contentedly as he placed pillows and coverlet from his bedding-roll on the two bedsteads, that had strong webbing stretched across them in lieu of mattresses. Then, to insure privacy and coolness, Durrant lowered the grass blinds on the verandas and bolted the door leading from the sitting-room to the servants' veranda.

No echo from an outside world jarred the nerves of the lovers. They might have been transported from the earth-plane to some celestial abode of bliss beyond hail of the world's turmoil, so exquisite the peace surrounding them. They decided to halt at the pagoda until the moon had risen, and to reach Ghanapur about midnight. While Durrant sipped his whisky and soda, he broached the question of their future. He told Olga how great was his temptation to ask her to marry him, but explained that he dared not do so, until he was in a financial position to support a wife. To achieve this end, it would be necessary for him to remain in the service of the Maharaja for a year or two longer, unless he were able to obtain employment in Europe during the ruler's forthcoming tour. Olga promised to wait but stipulated that if her ambitions were realized, and she made a fortune as Petrovka, Durrant should regard her earnings as his own, and their wedding should take place without delay. She also agreed to Durrant's suggestion that, to avoid

complications in Ghanapur, their engagement should be secret.

Again Durrant took Olga in his arms and repeated what he had told her many times during the previous twelve hours, that he was in love with her. For the time being he was, but for the time being only. To Olga this love affair was so important that to safeguard it she would have relinquished even her ambition to become a famous pianist. To Durrant it was merely a charming episode, a pleasant pastime, but one that he would never let interfere with his prospects and the accomplishments of his projects. Unaware of Durrant's perfidy, Olga sat at peace beside her lover, while the bloated lemon moon, that appeared in its swollen condition to be about to fall out of the sky, flooded the pagoda with a strong yellow light, imbuing the sculptured limbs with strange vitality, spiritualized, elusive.

When they reached the palace, Olga was surprised to find the staircase leading to her suite in darkness. Durrant appeared to share her astonishment, and sought Ram Lal. The butler explained with much salaaming and many apologies that he had been obliged to shift Olga's possessions from the visitors' wing, because some European friends of His Highness had telegraphed that they were arriving unexpectedly at Ghanapur early next day. Hearing that the piano had been shifted, Olga did not worry over the change, but Durrant feigned apprehension about the rooms that had been allotted to Olga. Ram Lal persisted that they were as comfortable as those which *Missie Sahib* had vacated.

"Let's go and see them, anyway," said Durrant to Olga. "If you don't like them, I'll try to get them changed for you in the morning."

Ram Lal led the way to the far end of the veranda where he opened a door through which Olga had never passed before.

"Don't be frightened, darling. My rooms are on this

side of the palace. I won't leave you to-night until I'm certain that you're comfortable," Durrant whispered.

He and Olga followed Ram Lal up a staircase that was shut off from the first floor by a massive brass-bound door, which Ram Lal opened. They entered a corridor and at the first door on the left Ram Lal halted.

Durrant drew Olga back and whispered, "I hope you'll often find your way over there," he pointed to a door on the other side of the corridor. "That's my suite."

"It's heavenly to feel I'll be so near you," said Olga.

The bedroom into which Ram Lal led them was more luxurious than the one Olga had previously occupied. From it, she and Durrant passed through a curtained archway leading into her new sitting-room, also better furnished and decorated in better taste than her former boudoir. Durrant told Olga that her present *de luxe* suite was usually reserved for important guests, and intimated that the Maharaja must have allotted it to her as a mark of appreciation of her genius.

"It's awfully good of H.H. to have given me such topping accommodation when he required my other rooms. He might have sent me down to the guest houses on the road to the city and that'd have been beastly."

"Thank God, he didn't darling. Unwittingly, H.H. has played our game most beautifully by assigning you accommodation so near me."

"Yes. Things have panned out far better than we could have foreseen," remarked Olga innocently. "By the way," she continued, "I wonder where that door leads." She pointed to one in her sitting-room, which had neither key nor bolts on her side.

Durrant also tried the handle, but unsuccessfully. "I'll put a chair against it," he remarked, "so that nobody can enter without making a noise, which'd be bound to wake me, for I'm a light sleeper."

"Thank you, dear. With you near me, I'll feel quite safe. Don't you think you'd better go now? I'd love

you to stop, of course, but I'm afraid Ram Lal'll start gossiping if you stay behind, after he's gone."

"Right ho, darling. I hate leaving you, but I expect it's wisest. As you say, we don't want H.H. to smell a rat."

"Pleasant dreams then."

"I know mine'll be pleasant all right, for I'll dream of you," said Durrant.

Olga had made a practice of dismissing her *ayah* early in the evening, for she was unable to tolerate the woman's snores, when the servant spent the night on the floor in her dressing-room. As she jumped into a warm bath, after Durrant's departure, Olga rejoiced that the *ayah's* nightly absence would facilitate Durrant's clandestine visits to her suite. From her bath Olga went straight to bed. She was over excited, and the whirr of the electric fan seemed to scratch an itchy place on her nerves. When she turned it off, and flung aside the curtains to let in as much fresh air as possible, the moon, strong as a searchlight, illuminated her bed. In vain Olga tried to dodge the glare. The moon was infuriatingly persistent. She moved her pillows to the foot of the bed in the hope that her head would be in shadow, then she tried the sofa, but no sooner did she lie down than again the light fell upon her. At last, in desperation, the girl took refuge on a couple of armchairs behind the grand piano and here she fell asleep. At about two a.m. she woke. She was close to the door, that she had been unable to secure on her side, and through it she heard Durrant's voice.

"Good night, Your Highness. I'm glad you're satisfied with the way I've carried out your instructions."

"Good night. I'm pleased with your day's work. It looks as though you'll soon be entitled to your reward of £100."

Sniggering laughter followed as though both speakers were enjoying a smutty story.

The next day, when Durrant came to fetch Olga to lunch, she asked him what business had detained him with the Prince until two a.m. The secretary denied that he had been with the Maharaja the previous night, and declared that Olga must have dreamt of the conversation that she said she had overheard.

Olga was convinced that the talk was no dream. Because she was in love, however, and dreaded to mar her romance by recrimination, bickering, and argument, such as had been plague spots on her married life with Ali Beg, she deliberately stuffed cotton wool into her mental ears. Her attention was then diverted from the subject by the entrance of Ram Lal, who expressed his sorrow at having shifted her unnecessarily. In the servant's hands was a telegram, the contents of which Olga could not see. Ram Lal stated that it was a second communication from His Highness's friends and cancelled their wire of the previous day, because, after all, they were unable to visit Ghanapur. Ram Lal, however, did not suggest moving Olga back to the guests' wing, and owing to Durrant's proximity to her new quarters, she was glad to remain in them.

A few days later, when Olga emerged from her room on her way to the Maharani's, she noticed that the corridors, verandas, courtyards, and gateways were lumbered with trunks, packing-cases, suit-cases, kit-bags, and every other conceivable variety of luggage, all stamped with the Ghanapur coat of arms, and bearing the titles of the Maharaja in large white lettering. Was the visit to Europe about to materialize sooner than she anticipated, Olga wondered. She could think of no other reason for an assembly of baggage formidable enough, so she erroneously estimated, to contain all the possessions that the Raja and his staff would require for a world-tour. Just before lunch time the mystery was solved by Durrant, who informed Olga that the ruler had decided suddenly to attend the wedding of a neighbouring prince, and was to

start his journey the same afternoon. Since the Wests' departure, on several occasions Olga, at the Maharaja's request, had not appeared in the dining-room when guests had been present on official business. By this manoeuvre, the Maharaja had insured that Olga should not be seen by British Government officials who, on their periodic visits to Ghanapur, took many meals with His Highness, though generally they stayed in the guest houses. Consequently, when Durrant told Olga that the Maharaja would be obliged if she would lunch in her own room, because during the meal in the dining-room, the District Transportation Superintendent from the nearest junction to Kotibagh would be discussing railway arrangements, Olga agreed without protest.

"What time is H.H. leaving?"

"The saloon's to be attached to the mail that halts at Kotibagh at midnight. H.H. has decided to dine in the saloon before the train starts, and the cooks and provisions went down in motor lorries early this morning."

"How many people is he taking with him?"

"Only a small staff including the home member and a couple of A.D.C.s. As a matter of fact, he's going on this wedding visit to try and borrow money from the bridegroom, who's a relation and is reported to be marrying a princess with a large dowry."

"Oh, then even H.H. has money troubles. I thought he was fabulously wealthy." It was the first time that Olga had an inkling of the Raja's real financial position.

"The trouble is that he's never taken into account the price of anything that he has fancied since he came to the throne. I've been told that when he lived in Europe as Maharaj Kumar he was different. Anyway, the fact remains that he's now head over ears in debt," Durrant replied. "I'm telling you these things, darling, because, as you're in State service, it's as well you should know how things really stand. Then, if necessary, you'd be able to screen H.H. from his critics. He's a most lovable

person, and he's to be pitied rather than blamed for his prodigality."

"I think he's charming, an absolute *sahib* and one of the best educated men I've ever met. When the *Shah Jahan* was turned upside down, before we reached Port Said, in order to accommodate H.H., I expected to find him detestable, but was most agreeably surprised right from the start."

That same evening, on return from the railway station, Durrant confided to Olga, under pledge of secrecy, the story of the Maharaja's love affair with Dorothea, of which he had heard from Krishnamurti. The private secretary was delighted that Olga's sympathy was all for the ruler to whom he hoped that she would quickly yield. He chuckled inwardly at the prospect of £100 so pleasantly and easily won, and during the Maharaja's absence continued to sing the ruler's praises. Both Durrant and Olga were fond of walking and took daily exercise on foot. Because of the wild scenery, Olga's favourite walk was down the old road to the guest houses, whence they obtained a fine view of the sun setting behind the gilded finials of the temples in Ghanapur City.

The Maharaja had told Durrant that he would be away about three weeks, but, owing to a cable from Boris Vronsky, he returned earlier. Durrant was the Prince's only companion on the drive from Kotibagh Station to the palace.

"Directly I decoded Vronsky's cable in which he says he has found a purchaser for the diamonds, I decided to return. As I've not succeeded in negotiating a loan with my relative, it's imperative that I shouldn't miss this opportunity of selling the stones. If I'm to take advantage of Vronsky's assistance, there's no time to be lost."

Durrant nodded assent.

"The sooner you leave for Paris, the better I'll be pleased."

Durrant beamed at the prospect of a trip to Europe.

"I've instructed the insurance company in Bombay to send their agent, Mitchell, to Ghanapur at once, and he should be here to-morrow. You must meet him, and bring him direct to the palace from the station. You must both leave for Bombay to-morrow night to catch this week's mail steamer. In the meantime no word to Olga or anyone else."

"Talking of Olga," said Durrant, "during Your Highness's absence I've paved the way for you, and I'm certain you'll find Olga a docile and charming mistress."

The Prince made no comment.

"As I have to sail for Europe at such short notice, it'd be a very great convenience to me Your Highness if you'd very kindly give me the £100 you promised," continued Durrant in a fawning manner.

"There'll be no difficulty about that," said the Maharaja.

CHAPTER XVI

DE PROFUNDIS

THE day after the ruler's return, Farid informed Olga that the Maharaja would be obliged if she would dine in her own room. The Persian lad explained that Mitchell Sahib, an English official, had arrived unexpectedly at the palace, and that the prince and Durrant would be occupied till bedtime with the visitor, who had come on political business. After dinner Olga took up a book, and ensconced herself in her sitting-room, between the electric *punka* and the open window, trying to find coolness, but being unusually drowsy, she decided to go to bed. She was unaware that at dinner her food had been drugged by Ram Lal, who had brought the meal to her sitting-room at nine o'clock. She was about to go into her bedroom when, to her surprise, the door, of which she did not possess the key, opened, revealing Farid.

"Whatever are you doing here at this time of night, it's eleven o'clock? Anyway, you've no business to enter my rooms without knocking."

The lad salaamed shamefacedly, but stood his ground. "His Highness wants you immediately. He says it's most urgent," Farid replied earnestly.

"What for?"

"I don't know, but please come at once, or His Highness'll think I haven't given you the message."

Olga had to obey the commands of her employer. She was astonished, as well as annoyed, at the unusual late summons and was apprehensive as to its cause. But she fortified herself with the thought that, in all probability, Durrant and the Raja were together. Consequently,

without protest, she followed the Persian through the mysterious door and looked about her curiously. She found that she was in a large luxurious study which, she imagined, must form part of the Maharaja's private suite. Farid hurried across the study, and led the way into a much bemirrored room. The sole occupant was the ruler, who, clad in a white silk shirt and loin cloth, reclined on a broad divan, occupying an alcove. Diamonds blazed in his ears and on his fingers. As the Prince rose, he dismissed Farid and advanced to greet Olga, who noticed that he was using a heavy scent new to her nostrils. The fragrance allayed the irritation she felt at Farid's intrusion into her room. To perfume, Olga, like her mother, was very susceptible.

"Olga, my dear, sit down. I want to talk to you about your musical career." The Maharaja pointed to the divan and, as there was no chair in the room, Olga had no alternative other than to seat herself beside the ruler. The stuffiness of the room and the strong perfume used by the prince increased the girl's drowsiness, and she had difficulty in keeping her eyes open.

"You remind me, my dear, of a beautiful English girl I used to know," said the Prince. "Her name was Dorothea and she was fair like you. Had I been able to marry her as I wished, I should have been a very different man, and life would have meant far more to me than it does now." Noting Olga's sleepiness, the Raja did not pause for her remarks, but continued, "I think we are very great friends you and I. I'll always be anxious for your welfare and shall consider it a great privilege to be the means of your realizing the ambition of your life."

"Thank you very much Your Highness. I'll be eternally grateful to you," Olga replied.

"Nicely put," returned the other. "Now I wonder whether you'd do a little thing for me?"

"Of course," said Olga, without the remotest inkling of what was coming.

"I wonder whether you'd consent to take Dorothea's place in my affections. You probably know that the Rani and I aren't friends and that, in consequence, I'm really a very lonely man." Before Olga could answer, the Maharaja had imprisoned her in his arms and pressed his lips on hers.

With a supreme effort the girl wrenched herself from the Prince's embrace. "Take your hands away," she cried. "If you dare touch me again, I'll leave Ghnapur." In her indignation Olga was superb, heroic, and the Maharaja realized that her character was of far finer texture than Durrant had led him to suppose.

"Don't be alarmed, pretty one," said the Maharaja, "my only wish is to make you happy. All I ask is that you'll be a companion to me and cheer my loneliness. My ambition is to make you famous as Petrovka."

"Your Highness, I can't do what you want. I'm in love with Jack Durrant, and he and I are engaged to be married."

The Prince looked his surprise. He now was convinced that Durrant had lied deliberately about Olga for the sake of the £100. To induce a trusting girl to believe that he was in love with her, and to promise her marriage, proved Durrant to be a greater cad than the Raja had imagined. Durrant had acted the part of a white slave dealer. The Prince thought it fortunate that Durrant was accompanied by a representative of the insurance company, for a scoundrel like the private secretary, would have no hesitation in stealing the diamonds, should an opportunity occur. The Maharaja determined that when the money realized by the sale of the diamonds was paid into his account, he himself would write the cheques in settlement of his bills, even though this involved delay. Durrant would then be unable to swindle him, except by extorting secret discounts from the Raja's creditors.

While these thoughts flashed through the Prince's

mind, he noticed, to his consternation, that Olga had turned deathly pale. Suddenly, she was seized with a fit of trembling, her teeth began to chatter and she wept hysterically.

The Maharaja's knowledge of medicine told him that Olga was not in a condition to bear further molestation that night. He would have assisted her to her room, but she pushed him away. The Prince then summoned Farid. "Help Olga to bed," the ruler commanded the Persian boy. "Then give her some brandy, for she's suffering from heart trouble. I don't want her *ayah* to see her in her present state, so you must spend the night on the floor in her dressing-room. If she can't sleep or wants anything, come and call me. Don't hesitate to wake me, mind you, and also, don't forget to leave her rooms before her *ayah* comes on duty in the morning. Come back after she's had the brandy and I'll give you a sedative that'll send her to sleep I hope."

Once out of the Maharaja's sight, Olga felt better. While Farid fetched the brandy, she crept into bed unaided, and when her consciousness had been dulled by the alcohol and the sleeping draught, she fell into a deep slumber.

Next morning, when Olga awoke, Farid had already disappeared, and her *ayah*, as was usual in the early hours of the day, was ironing on the veranda outside her bathroom. Olga's head ached, her mouth was parched, her eyelids were swollen, and she noticed that her voice sounded hoarse and discordant, when she bade her *ayah* bring coffee. As she lay back on her pillows and began to sort out her chaotic ideas, Olga made up her mind that she must leave Ghanapur immediately, for the price the Raja demanded for his patronage she would never pay. She entertained no doubts about being at liberty to depart from the Maharaja's State, but the thought of jeopardizing Durrant's position troubled her. Of course, Jack would take her part, but she determined to persuade

her fiancé to pretend to side with the Maharaja against her. She would hate to be separated from Durrant, but she would never forgive herself if, through her, he lost his employment when she was not in a situation to assist him financially, or to find him work. So far Olga had received no portion of her promised salary as teacher and companion to the Maharani, but she was naïve enough to imagine that she would be paid in full before leaving, and reckoned that, with the twenty odd pounds due to her from the Maharaja, plus the £50 subscribed on the *Shah Jahan*, she would have sufficient for a second-class passage to Europe. If not, then she would work her way back as stewardess, nursemaid, or in any other capacity for which there was a vacancy.

After dispatching Lakshmi with a letter of apology to the Maharani, in which she asked to be excused from giving the Princess her lesson that morning, Olga bathed, dressed and sat down to wait for Durrant. She hoped he would come to her room between twelve and one o'clock, after finishing his morning business with the Maharaja. When he did not appear by one-thirty, Olga, with nerves a-jangle, sent Lakshmi to his suite with a request that he would come to her at once. Lakshmi was grateful to Olga for many kindnesses, and returned genuinely distressed that the news she was bearing would upset her mistress still further.

"Durrant *Sahib* no there." Tears stood in the *ayah's* eyes as she gave this information in the broken English she had learnt in the service of Mrs Darcy, the wife of the former Commander-in-Chief of the Ghanapur forces.

"What do you mean?" gasped Olga, breaking into a cold sweat.

"*Sahib's* rooms all closed."

"Where's his bearer?"

"No there."

"Well, for God's sake go and find him," Olga shrieked, beside herself with anxiety.

DE PROFUNDIS

"Very well *Missie Sabib*. Me giving *Missie Sabib* then me going."

"I don't want any *tiffin*. Go at once, *ek dum*,¹ *jaldi*."²

Lakshmi padded out on her bare feet, the while Olga tried to compose herself and to invent some reason for Durrant's non-appearance. Perhaps he had been detained on urgent business with the Maharaja—but then the Prince usually ceased work about noon. The recollection of the belated meal on the day of her arrival with the Wests somewhat reassured Olga. Possibly H.H. had gone off into the jungle on some sportsman's errand, or, maybe, he had visited Ghanapur City, to discuss certain improvements that she had heard him mention to Durrant recently. Yes, there was no need for her to worry herself into a frenzy. Things would be bound to turn out all right. Olga endeavoured to occupy herself by planning her journey not to Tannenkop, but to Grafburg. She argued that, being a widow, she would resume her German nationality to assist her in finding employment in Grafburg. She only wished to earn sufficient to pay for her board and lodging and finishing lessons from Leo Mann, a former pupil of Petroff, one who had attained fame while she was still a child. Perhaps Mann would teach her free of charge—perhaps she could work for him in exchange for his tuition—perhaps—perhaps. Lack of food, coupled with heat and anxiety, was making Olga light-headed. She tried to read, to sew, to practise—in vain. The midday hot weather silence, that had seemed to her so divine at the Grey Pagoda, now made her want to scream with irritation. She opened her sitting-room windows, closed because of the high temperature, and stepped on to the veranda. Like a beam, the sun smote her head, causing her to stagger back for sun-helmet and glare-glasses. Again she moved on to the veranda and lifted the sun-blinds, aching for some sign

¹ At once.

² Quickly.

of life. The only noises to greet her jarred her nerves, that were already taut to breaking point. Two coolies, lying flat on their backs in the courtyard below, were snoring fortissimo, with mouths wide open, while a *darzi*,¹ squatting on his heels at the end of the veranda, bid fair to drown the snores with his sniffs, that succeeded each other with clockwork regularity. Hastily, Olga withdrew and closed the windows to shut out these sounds. She made no more effort to occupy herself but lay down under the electric *punka* and dozed. At about five o'clock she arose with a splitting headache. She wondered why Lakshmi had not returned. Had Durrant's servant accompanied his master? Had the *ayah* gone into the jungle in pursuit of him?

An hour later Lakshmi appeared, footsore and perspiring. She told Olga that, after making many inquiries in the bazaar, she had eventually found Durrant's "boy" drunk and asleep, in a toddy shop. When the *ayah* had succeeded in rousing him, she plied him with questions and had elicited the information that, on the previous day, he had packed his master's trunks and dispatched them to Kotibagh Station. Durrant had not told the servant his destination, nor when he would return, but had paid the "boy" three months' wages in lieu of notice.

That was all the news that Lakshmi had been able to glean, and with it Olga, perforce, had to be content. While she had been struggling in the Raja's embrace, her lover had sped away from her like a thief in the night. Olga was frenzied at the thought of Durrant's treachery, and her wounded vanity sharpened her wits. She recalled the night of her return from the Grey Pagoda, and the conversation she had overheard through the closed door leading from her sitting-room to the Maharaja's suite. What were the words? What had Durrant said? What had been the Raja's reply? Like

¹ Tailor.

letters of fire against a darkened sky, they flashed before Olga's mental vision.

"Good night, Your Highness. I'm glad you're satisfied with the way I've carried out your instructions."

"Good night. I'm pleased with your day's work. It looks as though you'll soon be entitled to your reward of £100."

Olga fancied that the sniggering laughter of the Maharaja and Durrant rang once again in her ears.

One hundred pounds! So that was the sum for which Durrant had betrayed her. The idea clutched at her throat till she feared she would choke. Hastening to the bathroom, Olga poured cold water over her face and hands. The shock gave her a queer sensation, for it chilled her heart as well as her head.

For several days after Durrant's departure, Olga only left her rooms to visit the Maharani. Her solitude made her realize how utterly alone she was, and how cruel India, despite its colourful glamour, can be to a European woman without friends. During her travels with the Wests she had met nobody to whom she could turn in her present plight, for as tourists, here to-day and gone to-morrow, the Wests had not become acquainted with English residents.

Having heard through her spies that Olga was now neglected by the Maharaja, the Maharani became more amiably disposed towards the English girl. On the pretext of prolonging her lessons, the Princess began to draw Olga into conversation. The girl was glad to be delayed in the Maharani's apartments, for she dreaded her hours of unbroken silence in the Maharaja's wing. She addressed several petitions to the Prince, begging to be released from her duties, also requesting that she might be given her arrears of pay, but she received no answer.

The Maharaja thought that after the first pang of grief

over her abandonment by Durrant had subsided, Olga in her loneliness and misery might relent. The ruler fondly imagined that Olga would take him on the rebound. At length, bored to extinction, and having relinquished all hope that Olga would make the first move towards reconciliation, he tried to hold out the olive branch himself. One evening, Farid informed Olga that His Highness would have tea with her on the following afternoon.

Olga trusted that, at the interview, she would induce the Maharaja to permit her to leave Ghanapur, but several times the Prince astutely side-stepped, when she broached the subject nearest her heart. At last Olga succeeded in telling the ruler that she wished to leave his service and that she proposed to start for Germany immediately, swearing that she would never breathe a word of her experiences in Ghanapur.

"I thought you intended to remain in Ghanapur until you could accompany me to Europe as a member of my staff and have your passage paid."

"Circumstances have forced me to change my mind, Your Highness. I prefer to be independent, and to go at once. Your Highness knows from my letters what my financial position is. All I ask is the pay due to me and my liberty."

"It pains me more than I can say to hear you speak so callously, and as though you were merely one of my employees. I look upon you as a sweetheart and would like to treat you as such, whereas you seem to wish to keep our relations on a purely business footing, eliminating all question of friendship, let alone affection."

"Yes, Your Highness, you're right. I should prefer to keep them on a business footing, but I assure you that if you'll enable me to leave Ghanapur, I'll be more than grateful to you and regard you as my true friend."

"Well, I'll see what can be done and let you know,"

said the Maharaja, preferring prevarication to refusal.

"Thank you, Your Highness." Olga rose to her feet and curtsied as she had done on board the *Shah Jahan*. She had only discontinued this habit at the Prince's own request. "I ought never to have accepted this costly present from Your Highness." She handed the platinum watch bracelet to the ruler.

The Maharaja refused to touch it. "I don't take back my gifts," he said haughtily.

"Then I'll send it to your study by my *ayah*. The bracelet has brought misunderstanding and misery into my life, and I don't want to have it any longer in my possession."

"Darling child, why are you so foolish? If only you'll let me, I'll be your best friend." The Maharaja rose from his chair, and endeavoured to embrace Olga.

"Leave me," she screamed furiously. "If you do that again, I'll run away from Ghanapur and report your behaviour to the Government of India."

The Prince laughed. He was convinced that Olga could never leave his State without his knowledge, and determined that she would never leave it at all, were there any risk of her enlightening the British authorities about his conduct. "Don't make a noise," he said, "if you do, you'll create a scandal that you'll be the first to deplore, and for which you alone, mind you, will suffer." He moved to the door, "You won't find escape from Ghanapur quite so easy as you think."

Olga was alone.

A few days later Olga abandoned her last hope of release, for she was again summoned to the Maharaja's presence, and again was obliged to frustrate his caresses by physical force. On this occasion, the Prince, weary of her obstinacy, gave orders in her hearing to Ram Lal to remove her possessions to a room in the old *zenana* wing of the palace. The ruler expected that banishment to rooms lacking electric light and sanitation would soon

cause Olga to change her mind. He foolishly imagined that she would so miss her piano and the luxury to which she had become accustomed that, in order to be restored to favour, she would soon beg for forgiveness and promise compliance.

Lakshmi waited upon Olga devotedly in her new quarters. In spite of the *ayah's* attentions, Olga was driven to the verge of insanity by the knowledge that she was a prisoner, and the propinquity of the late Maharaja's concubines, old harridans with withered breasts, distended bellies, cavernous mouths, blackened fangs, and gums stained red with betel juice. Had she known of a sure, swift method of ending her life, Olga would have resorted to it without a moment's hesitation.

At the end of four months, a certain measure of respite came to Olga from an unexpected quarter. At the beginning of October, the time of *Dasahara* arrived. This great Hindu festival was always an occasion for resplendent rejoicing in Ghanapur State. During the first nine days, called *Navaratra*, the Brahman priests were kept busy reciting prayers in honour of Durga, one of the manifestations of the wife of Siva, for the tenth day commemorates her slaughter of the buffalo-headed demon Maheshasur. It was customary on the tenth and last day of *Dasahara* for the Maharani, whose name was Durga, to hold a reception for the women folk of the Ghanapur nobles, and at this function the Princess always tried to impress her guests with her superior wealth and grandeur. For several weeks before *Dasahara* of 1921, the Maharani had been looking forward to displaying the diamonds that had been part of her dowry, for she felt sure that the Ghanapur ladies would be overwhelmed with envy, when they saw the gems in the new platinum settings which so much enhanced their beauty.

On the evening of the eighth day of *Dasahara*, when, from the latticed window of her wretched room, Olga was

trying to glimpse the illuminations in the palace courtyard, the Maharani's principal *ayah*, Bai, came to her begging that she would go immediately to the Princess. A strange sight awaited Olga. The Maharani, with long, black hair streaming wildly about her, was rolling on the floor screaming in her rage and frothing at the mouth. Olga seized a brass water pot and gently laved the excited little woman's face and forehead. This treatment soothed the Maharani, who beckoned Olga to sit down on the floor beside her. Olga obeyed and the Raja's wife explained the reason of her fury.

Early that morning, when the custodians of the Maharaja's strong-room were on duty, Bai, as was her annual custom on the eighth day of *Dasahara*, had applied for the Maharani's diamonds. Instead of delivering them to the *ayah* as in former years, the men had stated that they were unable to hand over the stones unless Bai presented a written authority from the Maharaja. Although usually addicted to procrastination, the Raja's wife had lost no time in making a written application to her husband for the required permit, and her misgivings had been aroused when the ruler had sent back a verbal reply that he was extremely busy, and could not attend to the request until the *Dasahara* celebrations were terminated. The Maharani had then despatched Bai a second time to the strong-room, with orders to wait until the keepers returned on duty after their midday slumber. The Princess had given the *ayah* five hundred rupees, a portion or, if need be, the whole of which sum was to be expended on the purchase of accurate information as to the precise whereabouts of the diamonds. Bai had been dubious as to the success of her mission, but fortune had smiled upon her. The pay of the custodians was in arrears and Lalji Rao, the guardian who had happened to reach the strong-room before his colleagues, was particularly in need of cash, for the marriage of his daughter. Therefore, by haggling and

disputation that would have done credit to a statesman, Bai managed to learn the truth for two hundred rupees. Lalji Rao stated that the diamonds had never been returned to the strong-room since the Maharaja had taken delivery of them in the presence of Durrant and another English *Sahib*, named Mitchell. The latter had left for Europe with Durrant *Sahib* immediately afterwards.

Olga evinced the greatest sympathy with the Maharani and, although she was unaware of it, kindled in the Princess's heart that rare, self-effacing, Indian affection which death alone can terminate. Before leaving the Princess's apartments, Olga restringed a rope of pearls that had been lying broken in the Maharani's jewel case, so that the Maharaja's wife should have some neck ornament of value to vaunt at her party, for to a Hindu woman a necklace is an essential piece of jewellery.

It seemed to Olga that she had only just fallen asleep when she was aroused by Bai, who again summoned her to the Maharani's presence. The Princess was calmer than on the previous evening. She was concentrating on the execution of a project over which she had been brooding for some considerable time, and which had been brought to maturity by her indignation over the loss of her diamonds. She resolved to enlist Olga's assistance in the campaign she was initiating against the Maharaja, for she assumed that the English girl must be as indignant at falling into royal disfavour, as she herself would have been in similar circumstances. The Princess proposed that Olga should enter her service and occupy a bedroom in her own suite. Olga welcomed the change and her few belongings were soon transferred into her new apartment, a large stone-floored bedroom, devoid of everything but the barest necessities. The Maharani also suggested that Olga should adopt Indian costume, for the Princess was afraid that if the English girl wore scanty European dress she might recaptivate the

Maharaja's affections, on one of his rare visits to his *zenana*. Olga rejoiced at the prospect of new clothes of any kind, for her own had fallen into a state of frowsiness, owing to the squalor in which she had lived since her banishment from the Maharaja's wing. After inspecting the English girl's wardrobe, which the Maharani had insisted upon the *ayahs* strewing over her dressing-room floor, the ruler's wife went to her cupboards and, with the eagerness of a child with a new toy, set about the business of disguising her English teacher. She selected from amongst the piles of clothes, that had formed part of her wedding outfit, *cholis*,¹ petticoats, *saris*² none of which fitted Olga. Indian women are altogether different in shape from Europeans, and to see Olga's breasts protrude where they should have been concealed and her flat stomach fail to support the voluminous petticoats caused the Maharani infinite mirth. Eventually, the Princess told an *ayah* to take Olga's measurements and instruct the *darzi* to make Olga Indian garments, because the tailor, being a male, could not on any account be permitted to enter the *zenana*.

"You must have an Indian name," remarked the Princess, delighted to indulge her passion for intrigue. "You shall be Hira, meaning a diamond, for that'll remind us of the grievous wrong my husband has done me."

Owing to the monotony of her days and to the absence of calendars in the Maharani's suite, Olga allowed the weeks to slip by unchecked. She had no communication with the Maharaja, saw nobody beyond the Maharani and the *ayahs* and never left the Princess's apartments. Olga quickly acquired fluent Hindi, as well as a veneer of Indian mannerisms, and this gratified the Raja's wife. The girl's misery, however, surpassed her unhappiness during the War, and she longed for the day when death would bring release.

¹ Short bodices that confine the bust.

² Indian women's draperies.

The Maharani constantly referred to the loss of her diamonds. In her desire to afford her mistress some relief, Olga suggested that the Princess should write for advice to a brother, of whom the Maharani was always boasting. He was an Assistant Collector and, because he was in British Government service, was treated with great respect by his brother-in-law, the Maharaja. The Maharani warmly approved of Olga's idea and declared that she would put it into immediate execution, but so overwrought did she become when attempting to describe her loss that, eventually, she insisted upon Olga composing the letter for her and then translated it into Hindi. The missive was sealed with the Maharani's own signet and delivered by Bai to the palace post office for dispatch. As the Assistant Collector was stationed in the south of Madras Presidency, the Maharani reckoned that a fortnight or, at most, three weeks might elapse before she received a reply, especially if her brother were in camp. When Christmas arrived, and still there was no answer, Olga began to regret the advice she had tendered, for the Princess brooded incessantly over her brother's silence, fearing that he had been the victim of some accident. The reason for the Assistant Collector's failure to reply was unsuspected by both women. They never guessed that the Maharaja had instituted a strict and secret censorship of the Maharani's correspondence, because he was afraid that she would inform her family of the strained relations between herself and her husband.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GHANAPUR DIAMONDS

IN March 1921, after a triumphal world tour, Boris Vronsky revisited Paris, where he rehearsed a series of artistic and daring tableaux to be produced at an ultra-modern theatre. The careful selection of his performers, and the exquisite settings in which their beautiful bodies were to be exposed, proved that his skill in stagecraft was undiminished, and that he continued to have no rival in the art in which he specialized.

Marie was still a very valued member of his company. Since the day, fifteen years ago, on which she was first engaged at the *New Art Theatre* in Grafburg, Marie's features had undergone the inevitable change attendant upon advancing years. Her eyes were sad and tired, mainly due to the loss of her daughter, the Petrovka of her hopes, but otherwise she was in good health, and she attributed her excellent physical condition to the strict discipline, abstinence, and diet to which she had become accustomed. Marie, however, had determined to leave the *New Art Company* at the end of the Paris season, for she was terrified at the prospect of being compelled to take a minor rôle, and of serving as the background for some young girl, by whom she had been superseded. She wished to retire from the stage while still in the heyday of success, and was thankful that her careful economy enabled her to do so. She had received ever-increasing salaries during her years of work and had never lived extravagantly. Consequently, her wise investments made, most of them, on the advice of Boris, insured her a comfortable income for the remainder of her life. Moreover, now that Marie had nobody to

work for but herself, she had no further incentive to increase her fortune, for she thought that the chance of hereever finding Olga diminished as the years rolled by. Marie's only real friends, besides Vronsky and the Stanins, were Cynthia and Esmée, and she resolved, when her Parisian contract terminated early in December, to visit London. Ever since it was too late, Marie had cursed herself for withholding both her stage name and the name of her employer from Olga, and for omitting to give the child the addresses of Esmée and Cynthia. She had been a fool to make Otto Mociusko Olga's only channel of communication with her, simply because of her fear that Petrovka might have been ashamed of a mother who was a naked dancer.

Vronsky's 1921 season in Paris was long remembered, owing to the classic beauty of his dancers and the lovely scenes in which they performed. At the request of his patrons, Vronsky revived *The Fountain of Bacchus*, the rôle of the Grecian deity being taken by a very handsome Sicilian peasant boy, whose nude photograph, exhibited in a Taormina hotel, had been sent to Boris by one of his agents. Franceso, though good as an artist's model, had neither Stefan's engaging charm nor artistic flair. Marie sighed when she thought of Stefan. She had wept bitter tears when he left the company, feeling that with him much of her own youth had departed. However, when Stefan had attained fully developed manhood, he had become useless to Vronsky, for Vronsky wanted youths alone for his tableaux.

During the rehearsal of his Parisian programme, Vronsky sought a purchaser for the Ghanapur diamonds, for the Maharaja had promised him a substantial commission on the sale. Boris obtained an introduction to Isaac Lindermann, a millionaire member of the New York Stock Exchange, who had amassed a colossal fortune by war speculation. Thinking that Lindermann might be interested in the diamonds, Vronsky decided to

cultivate the millionaire's acquaintance, as a bait, permitting him to witness the *New Art Company* rehearsing. To the New Yorker, the rehearsals were infinitely better than the public performances, for they afforded him longer time for minute examination of the dancers' charms, and during the intervals he chatted with the performers.

At the end of a particularly seductive rehearsal, Vronsky entrusted Lindermann with the secret of the Raja's financial difficulties. Boris confessed frankly that he had been promised a commission if he sold the Ghanapur diamonds. He showed Lindermann the letter in which the Mahārāja stated that he wanted £75,000 for the stones, but, of the secret slip, in which the Prince mentioned that he would accept £55,000 for a quick sale, Vronsky said nothing.

"You'll observe that Fanquiers offer £30,000 for the necklace and bracelets," remarked the Russian, producing his copy of the firm's letter to the Maharaja, "but they admit the stones to be worth about £90,000, and are willing to sell them on commission when a suitable purchaser can be found."

"How much will the Raja take?" queried Lindermann.

"As you see he's asking £75,000, but I shall advise him to accept £65,000, which, after deducting expenses and my commission of five per cent. would give him about £60,000. It's only because I know him to be desperately in need of money that I'll dare to make this suggestion, and I'm certain that he wouldn't accept a penny less. You observe that I put all my cards on the table."

"Sixty is twice thirty," Lindermann remarked.

"Agreed, but naturally the jewellers would only pay a nominal price for the stones, which might be on their hands for a long time before they could find a purchaser. However, should you think of availing yourself of the opportunity to buy these unique diamonds, why not see Fanquiers yourself? They had them repolished in

Amsterdam, and mounted in platinum in their own workshops, so they know all about them from A to Z."

The financier scribbled in his notebook. "Five per cent on £65,000 is £3,250. The Raja receives £60,000; difference £1,750. You agree?"

"Yes," said Vronsky, "but the diamonds'll be brought to Paris by the Raja's private secretary, accompanied by a representative of the company with whom the parcels'll be insured. Insurance and first-class expenses from and to India'll easily absorb the balance."

"I guess I'm not the guy to be a tight wad over a few pounds or dollars, when I buy goods that are O.K.," said the millionaire. "When can I see Fanquiers?"

"To-morrow if you like."

"Sure, fix the appointment. I've promised my wife a swell present, and I guess your diamonds'll fill the bill. Besides, they mayn't be a bad investment should I ever need to realize them. As you know it's a darn sight easier to lose a fortune than to make one. If Fanquiers assure me that the diamonds are the goods, and really worth £65,000, I'll take 'em."

"From their letter to the Maharaja," said Vronsky, "it's obvious that Fanquiers are out to make a huge profit. It's extremely unlikely, therefore, that you'd get the diamonds through them for less than the Maharaja's price of £75,000. Probably they'd want a higher figure, one nearer the market value of the stones. So far as you're concerned, all Fanquiers need to do is to give you an idea of the value of the Ghanapur necklace and bracelets. If you leave the purchase to me, I'll put the deal through for £65,000, because my commission would be much less than Fanquiers, and the result to the Raja about the same."

"I've got you," said Lindermann, "you'll find me the soul of discretion. If I buy the diamonds, it'll be through you."

At Fanquiers, Lindermann received full particulars of

the Ghanapur necklace and bracelets, and was shown photographs of them in their platinum settings. He was satisfied with the eulogistic recommendation of the jewellers, especially when they assured him that the stones were worth more than £75,000, the price mentioned by the Maharaja in his official letter to Vronsky. Within an hour of his interview with Fanquiers, Lindermann gave Vronsky a written undertaking that, provided the Raja's diamonds, upon arrival from India, were pronounced genuine by the French jewellers, he would purchase them for £65,000. Thereupon, Vronsky cabled to Ghanapur.

Charles Mitchell, the representative of the insurance company, and Durrant successfully smuggled the Maharaja's diamonds through the French customs at Marseilles, and their first anxiety on arrival in Paris was to place the gems in safe custody. Both men longed to be relieved of their responsibility, and with this object, lost no time in calling on Vronsky at his office in the theatre. The impresario welcomed the travellers and invited them to lunch.

"We can't discuss our business here," the Russian proceeded, "for walls have ears, and we're liable to frequent interruptions. After lunch, though, we'll have a private talk in my rooms at my hotel. Come in," he cried, in response to a tap at the door. "Ah, good morning, Damaris. Let me introduce you, my dear, to these gentlemen who are passing through Paris on their way to London from Cairo. Mr. Durrant, the star of my company, Damaris. Mr. Mitchell."

Marie was busy and did not observe a look of startled surprise in Durrant's face. Although Damaris was dark and Olga fair, there was something in the dancer's features and manner that reminded Durrant of Olga, and for a moment he felt guilty and uncomfortable. His expression, however, passed as rapidly as it came, and escaped the notice of all present.

"Thank you," said Vronsky, taking some papers from Marie. "If they're not very urgent, I'll deal with them this evening. These gentlemen are lunching with me to-day, and probably I shan't be back in office till about five, maybe later."

"There's nothing very urgent," Marie replied, "except those two German letters about the musical contracts. Perhaps you'd sign those now, the others can wait. Sonia Stanin'll be pleased if I'm free this morning, because she wants me to help in the gymnasium with some new girls."

Vronsky attached his signature to the two letters placed before him, and then dismissed Marie with a friendly nod. "Damaris is the most talented member of my company," he explained. "What's more, she's almost as useful to me off the stage as on it, for she deals with much of my correspondence which is in many languages."

"Damaris, I seem to remember the name," mused Durrant. "She wasn't in Cairo I believe, when I was there last November, and if I remember rightly, you were sorry that my Raja didn't see her."

"Best stick to our agreement," Vronsky reminded Durrant in a whisper, "we must forget India except behind closed doors. Secrets have a way of escaping."

"I accept your rebuke," said Durrant.

After lunch, the three men repaired to Vronsky's private suite in his hotel. Vronsky secured the outer door leading from the corridor into his own midget entrance hall, and next examined the doors of his sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom beyond.

"We're absolutely private here," he said, "and may speak without fear of listeners or interruption." The Russian then unlocked his desk, and, opening an attaché case, which fastened with a secret spring, took out a small file of correspondence. "I wish to remind myself and you also of the conditions laid down by His Highness.

He's most anxious that his name shouldn't appear in this transaction, and for that reason it'd be advisable for you," Vronsky addressed Durrant, "to forget all about India for the present."

Durrant nodded assent.

Vronsky continued, "You'll remember I told Damaris that you're both on your way from Cairo to London. That'll account for your arrival at Marseilles, and enable you to mention your journey by P. and O. steamer, should occasion arise. I suggest you remove all Indian labels from your luggage and pretend to be returning from business in Egypt."

"That'll be very easy," said Durrant.

"Quite so," Vronsky replied, adjusting his monocle and consulting the papers before him. "The Raja's instructions are very explicit as no doubt you know. After satisfying myself that the parcels containing the jewels are intact, I'm to take you to Fanquiers who, after verifying the stones, 'll give me their official receipt."

Three o'clock was sounded by sundry chimes.

"Immediately after you left me this morning, I arranged for an interview with Fanquiers. They've fixed three-forty-five, that is in three-quarters of an hour from now. As we've plenty of time, I'd like to satisfy myself before we go that the seals on the packages are unbroken."

Vronsky led the way into the bedroom, where Durrant and Mitchell removed their upper garments, and displayed the specially made braces, or rather species of brassières, which they wore next the skin. The braces, which were of strong washable material, fitted closely, and the bands that passed beneath the arms were furnished with small lace-up pockets, in which the precious pouches containing the diamonds were placed. When the pouches were removed, Vronsky compared the very elaborate seals with the sample sent him by post. He then bade the two men replace the pouches and

resume their garments. This done, the party set forth to the celebrated jewel-merchants.

At Fanquiers, Durrant and Mitchell again undressed, this time in a small room opening off the manager's private office, and both men heaved sighs of relief when they placed the pouches on the manager's table. Here, again, the seals were subjected to minute scrutiny. Then, in the presence of trusted experts, the jewels were unpacked. For the convenience of travel, the necklace had been divided into two portions, each occupying one of the pouches. The remaining two pouches contained the bracelets. On the dark baize-covered table the brilliants sparkled like great stars in an indigo sky, and excited the admiration even of Vronsky, the blasé, for the gems were perfectly matched and obviously of immense value. The experts, however, were quite unmoved as they compared the individual stones with enlarged photographs and entries in ledgers. Necklace and bracelets in their superb platinum settings were very carefully weighed, and found to tally in the minutest detail with the weights recorded at the time the jewels were reset. Having passed the exacting examination with complete success, necklace and bracelets were pronounced to be the genuine Ghanapur diamonds, and an official receipt was issued in duplicate. One copy was given to Mitchell, the other was retained by Vronsky.

Requesting Mitchell to wait in the lounge, Vronsky, on return to his hotel, went to his private suite with Durrant. "I'll come straight to the point," said the Russian, after they were seated behind locked doors. "In a very private note to me, the Raja agreed to accept £55,000 for the diamonds, £2,500 being my commission, and the other £2,500 covering insurance and other expenses."

"Where do I come in?" asked Durrant.

"We'll come to that presently," replied the other. "The Raja, of course, is a fool if he thinks that a fairly well-off man like myself, and a very busy one besides, is

going to all the worry I've had for a paltry £2,500. I've found a purchaser who's prepared to give £65,000 for the jewels, and I propose to take the additional £10,000 as my fair remuneration."

"Again I ask where do I come in?"

"I'll give you £1,000 as your share of the profits, provided that you, as the Raja's secretary, sign the receipt."

"I'll be damned if I do," cried Durrant.

"Don't raise your voice," said Vronsky, holding up a warning hand.

"I'll be damned if I sign that receipt," Durrant continued, "unless we go fifty-fifty. I won't grouse about your commission of £2,500, although I think you should share that with me too, seeing that I brought you this very profitable business. But I'll take damn good care, before I sign the receipt, that I get an equal share of the profits."

Vronsky was a man of rapid decision. He realized that Durrant held the master card, the receipt. Lindermann would demand a formal receipt for the money, and this, only the secretary could sign. Moreover, Vronsky did not wish his name to appear on any document in which the price paid by Lindermann was specified, lest the Raja should ever learn of the actual amount given by the millionaire. Consequently, the Russian yielded to Durrant without further discussion. After all, £7,500 was a reasonable profit on the sale, and Vronsky admitted to himself that it had been very easily earned."

"Very well, I agree. You shall have your £5,000 as soon as the money's paid."

"Thank you," said Durrant, trying to appear casual. He had difficulty in concealing his delight at the unexpected windfall.

Vronsky then issued his instructions to the Englishman. Furnished with a letter of introduction, Durrant was to see Lindermann in London and inform him that

the Maharaja's necklace and bracelets were with Fanquiers in Paris. The impresario felt sure that the American would lose no time in returning to Paris to make the purchase as promised by him in writing.

"Here's the letter of introduction," said Vronsky, handing Durrant a brief note he had just written. "The sooner it's delivered, the better. Mitchell has to report to his firm, and it'd be a good thing if you could both start for London to-night."

"Mitchell, I know, wants to leave at once. He's been in Bombay for over two years and is anxious to get to London to see his wife. I too am very anxious to clinch matters with Mr. Lindermann without any delay. If there were any hitch, the Raja'd be sure to blame me, and I might lose my job. H.H. has been pestering me with code cables of instructions about the sale at every port at which we halted."

"Be off then, to-night, both of you," remarked Vronsky, "and as soon as you've seen Lindermann wire me the date and hour of your return."

Four days later Lindermann and Durrant were in Paris. The interview with the jewellers was satisfactory to all concerned. Lindermann obtained possession of the Ghanapur diamonds, Fanquiers were assured by Durrant that their long outstanding account would be settled without delay, while Vronsky and the private secretary rejoiced inwardly when Lindermann wrote his cheque for £65,000 in Vronsky's hotel sitting-room.

"I've told my London bankers to inform their Paris branch that Mr. Durrant'll open an account here, and that this cheque, when presented, may be honoured without any questions," said the millionaire.

"Thank you," said Vronsky, "your action'll simplify matters. If you'll kindly accompany us to the bank, Mr. Durrant, who has a receipt ready, 'll hand it you there."

At the bank, in exchange for the cheque, Lindermann

received a receipt signed by Durrant. After Vronsky and Durrant had accompanied Lindermann to his car, they returned to the bank, where Durrant transferred the sum of £55,000 to the Maharaja's private account with a London bank, £5,000 to a new account in his own name, and £5,000 to another Parisian bank, for the credit of Stanin, now Vronsky's business manager. At the end of the month, when Stanin made the usual transfer of profits to Boris's private account, in yet another bank, the £5,000 was included in the remittance. The Russian thus avoided any record of having received his share of the £10,000 so dishonestly acquired.

The Maharaja had ordered Durrant to remain in Europe until all the claims of the creditors had been satisfied. Durrant, therefore, had to interview the firms concerned in London, Paris and other European cities, collect the bills, where possible obtain discounts, and forward the receipts to Ghanapur. These instructions, the ruler now modified. In accordance with the decision made by him on discovery of Durrant's lies about Olga, the Prince now issued the cheques himself. This arrangement involved much postal delay and prolonged Durrant's stay in Europe. The private secretary was delighted with the extension of his holidays, and spent as much time as possible in his beloved Paris. As Vronsky's friend, Durrant had free entrée into the theatre where the *New Art Company's* season was in full swing, and, like Lindermann, by whom he was frequently accompanied, had the privilege of witnessing rehearsals. Before long, Durrant learnt that the real name of Damaris was Marie Drayton. He felt convinced that he had discovered Olga's mother, over whose loss the girl had so often lamented to him, for he remembered Olga's account of her change of name from Drayton to Petermann. Durrant determined to make further investigations.

During an interval in a rehearsal of *The Fountain of Bacchus*, while Bacchus and his attendants were resting in

the wings, and out of earshot, he found an opportunity. "Damaris is one of the most graceful women I've ever seen," Durrant remarked, as though casually, to Vronsky. "Has she been long in your company?"

"She came to me fifteen years ago in Grafburg."

"Grafburg," muttered Durrant to himself, "it must be the same. I wonder," he continued, as though musing aloud, "how Damaris and those other lovely young women in your employ manage to keep free from matrimonial entanglements."

"Between ourselves, some of them don't," said Vronsky grimly. "However, it's my policy to pay the really useful artistes so well that they've no need of other sources of income. You understand?"

Durrant grinned assent.

"Take Damaris for example," Vronsky continued, "she's had all the entanglements she wants. She was a mother before she came to me, and now her one ambition in life is to find her daughter who disappeared during the War. We were in North and South America from 1914 to 1919, and Damaris went nearly mad with anxiety."

"I remember a similar case," said Durrant, calling to mind certain newspaper accounts he had read, soon after the Armistice, about a missing girl music student. With ready invention, Durrant mentioned that he himself had joined in the search, for he hoped that Vronsky would repeat his story to Marie, and that it would convince her of the futility of further investigations. Durrant knew that it would be a black day for him should Marie and Olga ever meet, and the mother learn of his treatment of her daughter. He continued, "Sir David and Lady Griffith, if I remember rightly, of Bangor, North Wales, but that doesn't matter, had a daughter at Stuttgart at the beginning of the War. The Griffiths are very influential and wealthy, coal or something, but they failed completely in their efforts to trace their missing daughter. The story came my way when I was in a

tourist agency in Marseilles, before my transfer to Cairo. Because of my knowledge of French, I was instructed to act as interpreter to the English private detective who was making investigations. Nothing, absolutely nothing, came of them, although the girl was supposed to have escaped to France and to have reached the Riviera."

"I wish to God you'd tell Damaris about the Griffith child, and say how hopeless her search must be after this lapse of time," said Vronsky. "My only grouse against Damaris is her mania for rushing off at a moment's notice to follow supposed clues, no matter how absurd. If you were to hint at the possibility of that daughter of hers being in Timbuctoo, she'd set off immediately. Since the return of my company to Europe this craze of hers has caused me great inconvenience, otherwise she's absolutely reliable and well-balanced. During all the years she's worked with me, she's never lost her head and made a fool of herself, despite the admiration that has been lavished upon her performances."

"If you really wish me to do so, of course I'll speak to Damaris about the Griffith child. The matter would have to be approached with caution I imagine. She might resent the interference of a stranger like myself in her private affairs."

"I'll give you the opportunity to-morrow, or rather to-day," said Vronsky, glancing at his watch, "for it's already three a.m. Come to my office before lunch, say at half-past twelve, and, after working round to the subject, I'll leave you two alone together."

Durrant had ascertained what he required to know. Olga's mother then was not only alive but consumed with the desire to find her daughter. By all means, fair or foul, the two must be kept apart, even if such separation meant Olga's death in Ghanapur. If he, John Durrant, could prevent it, the talented and beautiful girl whom he had seduced and shamefully sold, would never realize her ambition of becoming world-famous as the pianist

Petrovka. Then a guilty dread gripped Durrant. Suppose Olga had not yielded to the Maharaja's solicitations; suppose she had not consented to occupy the couch to which her pretended fiancé had consigned her; suppose the ruler had discovered that his secretary had lied deliberately while accepting the bribe of £100. The thought of the Raja's displeasure did not trouble Durrant very much, for he possessed the ruler's secret about the diamonds. Durrant had lied before and could lie again. But what if Olga escaped from Ghanapur, or, what was as bad, was sent away in disgrace? Durrant told himself that if Olga ever regained her liberty she would seek vengeance for his duplicity and desertion. If she could prove his infamous conspiracy with the Maharaja, John Durrant would be branded as a white slave dealer.

Durrant tried to reassure himself. The Maharaja might soon tire of Olga, if he had not already done so, but he would never set her at liberty, of that there could be no doubt. If she proved refractory she would be relegated to the *zenana*, and, maybe, spend a few years in the rags and dirt appropriate to that situation; probably she would lose her reason; possibly—and best of all—she might be already dead.

When Durrant was admitted into Vronsky's office, the impresario and Marie were together.

"Sit down, Damaris," said the Russian, when Marie rose, intending to withdraw. "Last night Durrant told me a story which I wish him to repeat to you. It's about the disappearance of a Miss Griffith, and it's so similar to the tale of your daughter, Olga, that I feel sure you'll be interested."

Thus launched, Durrant repeated, with appropriate embellishments, the narrative he had recounted to Vronsky. During the interval, he had drawn upon his imagination for details. The girl was seventeen years of age at the outbreak of the War. She was a violin student, very beautiful, fair and talented. She had been

living with a German family and, when last seen after the commencement of hostilities, was in a queue outside the Swiss Consulate. The detective's investigations in Marseilles were recounted with a vividness that did credit to Durrant's mythopœic gifts, and Marie listened with attentive interest to every detail. Vronsky left his office shortly after Durrant's recital commenced, and when it concluded, Marie, in a voice broken with sobs, expressed her thanks.

"I'm most awfully sorry to have awakened sad memories of your own child," said Durrant, "but Vronsky thought it might be some consolation to you to know that your pathetic story isn't unique, and that the Welsh coal magnate, despite his money and influence, failed in his search just as you've done."

"It was thoughtful of Boris," said Marie. "He's always been very kind and considerate to me which, of Boris, is saying a great deal. I know my sudden demands for leave of absence often irritated him exceedingly, and I suppose if I hadn't been of real use to him, he'd have given me the sack before now."

Marie was attracted by Durrant's soothing manner and accepted a few of his invitations to lunch and supper. Durrant profited by these occasions to re-emphasize the hopeless futility of further search for Olga. He described himself as an ex-officer, who had turned courier, and told Marie about his travel experiences with wealthy clients in Europe and Egypt, but let no mention of India escape him. When Durrant made his adieux, at the commencement of October, Marie thought he was returning to Cairo for the tourist season. On her part, Marie made no allusion to her pending retirement, which was a profound secret between Vronsky and herself, and Durrant imagined that Damaris, as a valued member of the *New Art Company*, would remain in Vronsky's employ for many years.

During Durrant's absence in Europe, the commission

appointed by the Government of India had issued a report on Ghanapur State. The money realized by the sale of the diamonds had enabled the Maharaja to settle his private debts from his own purse, without further encroachments upon State funds. The ruler was warned that future utilization of State revenue for his private extravagance would lose him his throne. Thoroughly alarmed, the Raja was compelled to accept the services of two British officers. One of the newcomers was a doctor to reorganize the hospital in Ghanapur, the other was an engineer to improve the water supply, initiate various public works, and repair and extend the roads, for the only highway really fit for fast, modern transport was the one connecting Kotibagh Station with Ghanapur City and the Palace.

On his return to Ghanapur, towards the end of October, and while his car was on the way from Kotibagh to the palace, Durrant first learnt of the doctor's arrival, because one of the guest houses showed signs of occupation. His driver stated that the *burra* Doctor *Sahib*, Major Jones, was in residence. Being conversant with bazaar rumours, generally strangely prophetic in India, the chauffeur added that Rayner *Sahib*, the engineer, was coming back. Durrant was rather pleased to hear of the new officials, because there would then be some English society in Ghanapur and, possibly, an occasional game of bridge. At first, he regretted that there was no Doctor *Memsahib*, and hoped that the engineer would be accompanied by a wife. Then, on second thoughts, he decided, better not. A *memsahib*, especially if conversant with Hindi, might hear about the white girl in the palace. If an interfering sort, she might try to occupy her enforced idleness with good works, and certainly would try to call upon the Maharani. No, Durrant began to hope most fervently that Rayner, the engineer, like Jones the doctor, was a bachelor.

Durrant's first concern was Olga As he feared Olga

had not consented to become the Raja's mistress. At their first interview, the ruler taxed Durrant with his dishonest acceptance of a reward he had not deserved. Durrant had recourse to lies for his defence. He swore that Olga had agreed to transfer her affections, and as she had not done so, knowing that the Raja would refuse, Durrant offered to refund the £100.

Durrant was correct in his surmise. The Raja did refuse the £100, and indignantly.

Durrant then hinted to the Prince that Olga's escape from Ghanapur might be very embarrassing, but the ruler assured him that such a thing was quite impossible. Olga might, conceivably, have escaped from her first place of imprisonment, described by the Raja as "The Haggery," for the females housed in this noisome wing of the old palace were too hideous and ancient to be worth the cost of protecting. The Rani's own wing, however, was well defended, both exit and entrance being impossible without the connivance of the male and female guards always on duty. The ruler said Olga seemed quite content with her situation in the Rani's service, and was, therefore, less likely to give trouble in the Princess's apartments than elsewhere. Moreover, while the white slave girl remained in his wife's residence, it was easier for the Raja to keep his eye on her than if she were removed to remoter quarters. Durrant next reminded the Raja that the presence of English people in Ghanapur might create difficulties. If they heard that a European girl was imprisoned in the palace, they might send reports to the Government of India.

"Let them," replied the Raja, "I'm not the only Indian ruler with European women in his *zenana*. Who's to interfere with me engaging an English teacher for my wife? Anyway, the Government of India isn't going to worry itself about one white prostitute more or less in the country. Put your mind at rest, I'm sure there's absolutely no need to worry."

"I'm glad anyhow that Dr. Jones is unmarried, and hope that Rayner hasn't a wife, for an Englishwoman here, with nothing to do, 'd be bound to try and call on the Maharani and might meet, or at least hear of, Olga."

"Rayner was certainly a bachelor when here four years ago, and as he was middle-aged then, he's unlikely to have married since."

With these assurances, Durrant had to be satisfied, though he would have given much to have heard of Olga's death.

The private secretary had not been back in Ghanapur for many days before he learnt of the serious rupture between the Maharaja and the Maharani, owing to the disappearance of the diamond necklace and bracelets. Indeed, the Raja took an early opportunity of obtaining Durrant's advice.

Lalji Rao, the keeper of the strong-room, who had succumbed to the Maharani's bribes, had been lodged in the State jail, where he would remain awaiting trial for a considerable time. The Raja had not yet dealt with Bai, the go-between, for she was a very old and trusted retainer of his wife's family. It would not be to his interest to give the Princess fresh cause for anger against him. Hence, all the Raja was able to do was to maintain his postal censorship. All envelopes addressed to the Princess, and all those dispatched by her, reached his study. There, in secret, the ruler himself opened the correspondence, by means of clean, wet blotting-paper placed on the flaps of the envelopes. Those letters concerned with trivial, everyday matters were allowed to pass, after the Prince had reclosed the envelopes with the Rani's seal of which he possessed a duplicate. Naturally, any missives containing the Princess's complaints about her spouse were suppressed. To allay still further Durrant's fears about Olga, the Maharaja added that, since the girl's arrival in Ghanapur, her meagre incoming and outgoing mail had also been well scrutinized, so

that no news of her experiences in the palace could reach the outside world through the post.

While Durrant approved of the rigid censorship of correspondence, he advised the Maharaja to procure, without delay, paste replicas of the necklace and bracelets. These, he said, could be obtained in Calcutta at a trifling cost. He suggested that the Prince should visit the Maharani immediately, and inform her that her jewels had been sent to Paris for further polishing, and would be returned in a few weeks.

"The very thing," exclaimed the Prince, pressing Durrant's hand gratefully. "Why didn't we think of it before? You could have brought back perfect paste copies with you from Paris. However, thank the Lord, we've the photographs. You'd better set off for Calcutta immediately, and wait there till the sham jewels are ready. Anything to stop that cursed woman's tongue from wagging, and prevent her from sending a letter somehow or other to that infernal I.C.S.¹ brother of hers, about whom she's always bragging. It's a mercy she's a fool and won't know the imitations from the real. Could you leave for Calcutta to-night?"

"Certainly, Your Highness, it's only midday. I'll need money for the journey of course."

"That's all right. Come back here to my study after lunch, and I'll give you the sum you require from my private account."

In about three weeks, Durrant returned from Calcutta with the copies. Though not quite so convincing as the wonderful paste jewellery to be obtained in Europe, the imitations, so Durrant thought, were sufficiently skilful to deceive the Rani. The sham platinum had given more difficulty than the stones, and had necessitated the employment of a special silver alloy, which would pass amongst the inexpert for the precious metal. The Raja was delighted with Durrant's purchases, which looked

¹ Indian Civil Service.

very effective in the satin-lined cases that had once contained the original stones. The ruler had not visited his wife during Durrant's absence, and the yarn about the further polishing of the diamonds in Paris now being unnecessary, he decided to present the fictitious dowry to the Princess without loss of time.

When the Maharani was informed of the visit of her lord and master she was much perturbed. She was glad that time was too short for the preparation of an elaborate banquet such as is associated with rejoicing. Fruit, savouries, sherbet, and different kinds of sweetmeats were made ready, but the Rani attired herself in mourning garments and wore no jewellery.

As soon as the Maharaja appeared, the Rani dismissed her waiting-women, Olga among them. When she was alone with her husband the Princess prostrated herself at his feet. Her theatricals amused the Raja who, having ensconced himself on a low divan, bade her rise and seat herself beside him.

"Why these signs of mourning?" asked the Prince.

"I mourn the loss of my beautiful jewels," was the reply.

"Then your day of sorrow is at end," said the Maharaja, glad of the chance for a touch of melodrama which would, he knew, appeal to his wife. "Here are your diamonds, see I myself bring them to you." As he spoke, he opened the Paris-made cases with a flourish, and placed them in the Rani's hands.

The Princess gave a cry of joy as the paste glittered in the electric light and, once more prostrating herself before the Raja, begged him to forgive her for thinking him capable of stealing her precious jewels.

Again the Raja assisted his wife to rise, and, while she squatted beside him, fastened the imitation diamonds about her neck and arms. He was much relieved at the pride with which she displayed the ornaments, when she summoned her waiting-women to carry in the refresh-

ments. The comestibles were in readiness in an ante-room where, prior to the Prince's arrival, food and drink had been prepared by the Maharaja's own cooks and sampled by an official taster, to insure that the viands placed before the ruler by his wife's *ayahs* contained no poison. In accordance with the custom of the East, the Rani waited on her husband, and when the Maharaja retired, harmony had been restored in the palace.

At Christmas, the Raja received a long letter from Mr. West. The American's affairs had improved and he was restored to affluence. The concluding paragraphs gave the Maharaja food for thought. They ran as follows :

"Isn't it queer how small the world is? Last week, my wife and I were present at a swell reception held in honour of a Russian prince, a near relative of the murdered Czar.

All our ladies had on their swellest gowns, and Mrs. West was much attracted by some mighty fine diamonds worn by her intimate friend, Mrs. Isaac Lindermann of New York, wife of the great financier of whom Your Highness may have heard. To Mrs. West's astonishment, Mrs. Lindermann stated that the diamonds, a necklace and two bracelets, had recently been purchased from Your Highness. My wife insists that she recognized the jewels, because she actually tried them on, when they were shown to us, during our very delightful visit to Your Highness's interesting and historic State.

Mrs. West was real worried as to how those stones got to New York, for she feared they might have been stolen from Your Highness and sold to Mr. Lindermann without Your Highness's knowledge. Thinking there must be some mystery which Your Highness would wish cleared up, I called on Mr. Lindermann next day. He, however, assured me that the diamonds

had been purchased from you on the square, and mentioned the price, £65,000, for which he holds the receipt signed by Your Highness's private secretary.

When I said that I guessed Your Highness would be pretty sore to learn of the publicity given to the sale of your diamonds, Mr. Lindermann told me that, in Europe, he had never mentioned your name in connection with the diamonds. He also explained that in America he had only announced that he had purchased the State Jewels of Ghanapur because this would increase their value should he ever want to sell them.

Your Highness may be interested to know of the admiration which your beautiful jewels have evoked on this side of the Atlantic. All our ladies are crazy about them."

His Highness, the Maharaja of Ghanapur was indeed interested. He raged at the idea of having been swindled by Durrant to the extent of £10,000. Next, his thoughts turned to New York. If the sale of the Ghanapur jewels was common knowledge in that city, the news would probably filter through to India, and that, so he thought, would be the very devil. The Maharaja debated in his mind how to deal with Durrant, who would be bound to deny that Lindermann had given more than £55,000 for the necklace and bracelets. Then there would be only West's and Lindermann's word against Durrant's, and, while the Raja did not doubt that he had been cheated by his private secretary, he felt he must have definite proof before accusing the Englishman of dishonesty. Without losing time, the Maharaja composed a reply to Mr. West's letter, expressing thanks for greetings and news about the stones. The Raja added:

"I should be very grateful if you would very kindly obtain a copy, preferably a photograph, of the receipt to which you refer. My agents gave me only

£55,000 for the jewels, so if Mr. Lindermann paid £65,000, I have been robbed of £10,000.

Please assure Mr. Lindermann that the only use I will make of any proof he may consent to furnish will be to punish the guilty party. You may add that Mr. Lindermann's name will not be published, for very obviously, it is impossible for me to take the matter to court."

CHAPTER XVIII

WAITING FOR DEATH

ALTHOUGH the evening of All Souls' Day in Paris was one of the very few holidays of the *New Art Company*, Vronsky devoted it to attempting to persuade Marie to withdraw her resignation. It was his intention to return to Grafburg the following December, and to open at his old theatre on December 25, Christmas being a theatrical gala night in Germany. What Marie's feelings would be if she agreed to remain and take a secondary rôle, as he wished her to do, Vronsky did not take into account. Because he was anxious, desperately anxious, not to interfere with the smooth working of his organization, of which she was so important a member, for the first time during all the years she had worked for him, he admitted to her his great appreciation of her capabilities. At the end of their tête-à-tête dinner in Vronsky's private sitting-room, the impresario remarked, "Marie, my dear, for a clever woman, you're the greatest fool I've ever met. What are you going to do in London without interests, without work, without anything to make life worth while? I don't suppose that at your age you intend to embark upon a career of amorous adventure."

"Boris, I daresay you're right, I am a fool. Now that I've lost Olga, though, I've nobody to work for except myself, and it doesn't seem to me worth while to fade away before the public eye, while my juniors, like vultures, await my end."

"Don't be so silly, you're talking nonsense."

"Boris, I know I'm right. My mirror tells me the

fading process has begun. Besides, if it hadn't, you wouldn't get somebody else to play lead."

"How old are you?"

"I was born in 1880."

"Then you're forty-one. Why you're a young woman. It's a pity you haven't Mistinguett's spirit. She defies age and I take off all my hats to her for doing so. Your figure's still good, if you don't get too scraggy, and you should be able to take secondary rôles for another ten years or more. Besides, before that, Sonia Stanin's bound to retire and you'll be able to step into her shoes as physical culturist. I promise you that I'll always find some job for you, if not on the stage, then in my office as foreign secretary. Won't that satisfy you?"

Marie remained silent.

"Why fret that you can't be principal star any longer? Why kick against the pricks? I've become used to your companionship in business, and don't want to let you go. Financially you won't be the loser by remaining with me, I promise you."

Marie was much touched by this gesture of goodwill on the part of the cynical, hard-headed and, supposedly, hard-hearted business man. "Thank you, Boris, a thousand times. Will you let me do one thing?"

"What's that?"

"I know I'm asking an awful lot, but when my present contract ends I'd like to take two months' holiday, without pay, of course. If you'd let me do this, it'd enable me to return to the company if I should find unemployment unbearable."

"All right," said Vronsky grudgingly. "I agree. If you won't take my word for it, you must go and try for yourself I suppose."

"Thank you again."

"I warn you though that you'll soon tire of purchasing occupations far less congenial to you than those for which you've been hitherto highly paid. Paying for the

privilege of something to do is a mug's game. Everybody who hasn't a paid job but a hobby instead; in other words, everybody who plays at work, has to keep his hand permanently in his pocket."

"But Boris, don't you ever intend to retire? There's no need for you to go on working. You've fame, money, everything that you require."

"I'll never retire," was the reply, "not unless I become a back number and my company's surpassed by others, and that shan't happen unless my brain becomes impaired. Should that occur, then I'll blow it out. Death alone shall put up the shutters in front of my life's shop window, and I mean to live until I die." Vronsky spoke in his usual decisive tone, but there was a combative note in his voice. "I intend to wear out, not rust out." The Russian clenched one hand as though ready to strike some invisible assailant. "Waiting for death on the quay of life, killing time by playing patience or solving acrostics, until Charon's barge comes along, has no attractions for me, as it appears to have for you."

The words "waiting for death" made Marie shudder.

"Once I thought my business was only to be a means to an end," Vronsky continued. "I hoped to buy the home of my ancestors, which was sold after my father's death, but the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism knocked that dream on the head. My work's now the end as well as the means, and I'm content for it to be so, for, after all, as Stevenson says, 'To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive'!"

Marie's sadness increased. Her ache to continue her journey along the path that had grown dear to her as Damaris, the fêted one, burnt into her soul. She hated the sight of her legs that seemed to her too thin, as they protruded beneath her short skirts, while in a wall mirror behind Boris's chair, she glimpsed her face that,

for all the massage lavished upon it, looked to her direfully drawn.

As Boris recalled the incident of the Ghanapur diamonds, he remarked with a twisted smile, "I've had lots of queer and interesting experiences on my life's run."

"I'm sure you have."

"Yes, but, my dear, I'm not going to turn reminiscent. That's one of the first signs of senile decay. Looking backwards, while attempting to advance, never did anyone a scrap of good."

A wave of misery swept over Marie as she bade Vronsky farewell, and saw him turn to his writing-table to attend to business that was no longer any concern of hers. Although he told her that he expected her back in less than two months, she felt as though she were attending her own funeral, as though Damaris were dead, never more to rise.

Marie had purposely concealed the hour of her departure from the *Gare du Nord*, for she was afraid of breaking down at the station should any members of the *New Art Company* see her off. The English Channel was stormy, and Marie, who had never before felt seasick, experienced squeamish discomfort as the Calais-Dover boat was buffeted by squalls. Hitherto, when she had travelled, it had either been on the business of the *New Art Company*, or on a quest for Olga, and in both circumstances she had been too engrossed with the duties immediately ahead of her to ruminate. Now she had plenty of time in which to reflect—too much time. Without any pressing task she felt lost. She tried in vain to be elated by the reflection that she was no longer weighed down by poverty, nor responsibility, as on the last occasion on which she had crossed the Channel, and that she was free, for the first time in her life, to do whatever she liked. The irony of it all was that there was nothing she particularly wanted to do. At Dover,

she left her luggage in charge of a porter, and, as she was feeling faint with the cold, she made her way to the refreshment room. She was always extremely abstemious, but ordered a brandy and soda as a restorative, and felt thoroughly aggrieved when a flamboyant barmaid replied with a lofty drawl, "Sorry, Medim, it's out o' hours."

During the War Marie had read of D.O.R.A., but had not expected to find herself in conflict with the law of her country within five minutes of landing, after an absence of fifteen years. A London fog further depressed her. She went to a hotel recommended by Esmée, and as soon as she had arranged accommodation, Marie telephoned to the artist.

Esmée's slightly husky voice, heard after a spacious interval of years, cheered Marie, and she was delighted when Esmée promised to put off another engagement, and dine with her that same evening.

"Marie you've not changed much," said Esmée, kissing her warmly, "only be careful not to get too thin as I've done."

Marie refrained from commenting on Esmée's altered appearance. The artist had shrunk, and her careful make-up failed to conceal the wrinkles that criss-crossed her face in all directions. Her hair, peroxide-blond, and carefully waved, ill suited Marie's remembrances of Esmée's former, dashing, dare-devil beauty. The painter was no longer forceful, harmonious, perfectly balanced, but somewhat querulous—a middle-aged woman, acutely conscious of the flight of that youth which evaded her efforts at recapture.

"How long do you think of staying in London?" Esmée asked.

"That depends. You see I've retired from the stage and may settle here permanently."

"But won't you get hopelessly bored? The stage too's a rotten profession, if you should want to get

engagements. You might get on the films, but that work too's beastly overcrowded these days."

"I don't want to get work in London. I can rejoin my company to-morrow if I like, but I don't relish the idea of being a back number where once I played lead. Though my boss says he'll always find me some job, I know that, in a short time, he'd feel he was employing me out of charity, and he'd let me feel it too. It's bad enough to be superseded, but it'd be more than I could stand to be a super, and from the background watch my successor's triumphs." Marie then confided to Esmée the exact nature of her work with the *New Art Company*, of which she had only hinted in her letters, and her reasons for coming to London incognito, and for concealing that she and Damaris, the nude dancer, were one and the same person. "You see," she remarked, "I still hope to find Olga. Now that I've finished with the *New Art Company*, and Damaris no longer exists, there'll never be any need for Olga to know how I earned my living."

"But do you really think there's any chance of your finding Olga after all these years?"

"I mean to go on trying anyway. Olga's a British subject, and that makes me hope that possibly in London I may get hold of a clue. Now that I'm free, if I do get any information, I'll be able to nip off at any moment without any qualms about the inconvenience I may be causing Vronsky."

Esmée smoked in silence. She saw little prospect of happiness for her friend, alone, and unknown, in London, for she realized that Marie, like herself, had never learnt the trick of doing nothing. At last she said, "Marie dear, if I can help you in any way you know I'll always be ready to do so. I can guess what you feel about the loss of Olga, for I feel almost the same about the loss of Jane."

"Good God? Is Jane dead? My dear, I'm so awfully sorry."

"She's dead to me for she's disowned me."

"Disowned you! What do you mean, Esmée?"

"To cut a long story short, John died in 1914 and according to the settlement he made on Jane, she came into her money when she was eighteen. She married almost immediately afterwards an impecunious younger son of a hard-up nobleman, who took kindly to his moneyed daughter-in-law, but, so Jane maintained, wouldn't tolerate the daughter-in-law's unmarried mamma."

"Well, I'm damned!" Marie wondered whether Olga, if found, would adopt a similar attitude.

"Yes, when Jane stalked out of my life, she left it very empty."

"Couldn't we perhaps, Esmée you and I together, carve out a fresh existence with the worn-out tools Kipling speaks of?"

Esmée fidgeted nervously. "I suppose I ought to have told you in my letters that I married about a year ago. I'd no idea you see that you contemplated settling in England, and I hate writing screeds. I thought I'd tell you personally."

Marie endeavoured to conceal her disappointment. Esmée would be no good as a bulwark. With an attempt at cheerfulness Marie remarked, "I'm delighted to think you've a companion to help and protect you. It must be a great comfort to you. I hope I may meet your husband. What's his name?"

"Ted Horton, but of course I'm always 'Esmée Lane' professionally and, indeed, very few people ever address me as 'Mrs. Horton!'" Esmée paused to reflect, then added, "If you'll come and take potluck with us to-morrow at lunch, you'll meet Ted. I'll tell him to get back early from business for it'll be Saturday."

"Thanks, I'll be delighted."

Esmée's studio seemed to Marie devoid of many of its former treasures. The guest rejoiced to see the Buddha

beneath his snake protector. He alone was unchanged and, unlike human beings, offered no disappointment after the lapse of years.

While Marie was occupied in her contemplation of the idol, Esmée entered. "Ah, I expect you recognize Buddha; Ted wants to sell him, but I hope he won't find a purchaser. Buddha's been so long in this studio that I'd hate to let him go."

"I don't wonder. If I were the owner I'd never want to part with that image."

"Of course Ted's different. You see he's a curio and antique dealer, and a man who trades in such things can't afford to be sentimental."

"Of course that's bound to make a difference," said Marie, fearful that she might betray her indignation at the idea of Ted Horton disposing of his wife's possessions.

"Oh, Ted's very clever at his job, and I'm sure you'll like him."

"Did I ever meet him before I went to Grafburg?"

"Good gracious, no. Ted must have been a kid in those days. He's Canadian. I met him in London when I was working in a hospital during the War. His father, who's dead, had a curio business in Quebec, so when Ted got his gratuity, he invested it in an antique shop in Kensington."

"You must be a great help to him with your artistic training, knowledge, and experience."

"I try to be." Esmée did not inform Marie that her savings had supplemented Ted's gratuity and enabled him to buy a share in his Kensington business; neither did she state that, up to the present, there had been more expenditure than profit in connection with the venture.

At this junction Ted appeared. He was tall, fair, straight-featured, with a winning smile; one of those good-looking young men who, to have cash for their girl sweethearts, marry women with money, women often old enough to be their mothers. Ted welcomed Marie

very cordially, mistaking her at a first glance for a woman of about his own age, which was twenty-eight. He lavished attention upon Marie during lunch and she was very apprehensive that, unwittingly, she might arouse Esmée's jealousy. "By the way," said Ted to his wife, "did you tell Marie about the Siva statue?"

The door of Marie's memory flew open to admit visions of Donald Fancourt. He seemed to belong to another world, he and his dance, to a world she had almost forgotten.

"No, Marie and I've had so much to talk about that I forgot, but I'll tell her now." Esmée turned to Marie. "You remember Donald Fancourt?"

Marie nodded.

"Well, he died from the effect of wounds a couple of years back. He was quite wealthy because he inherited his father's fortune, but he stuck to the stage until War broke out. I used to go and see him in hospital, and when he died he left me his Dancing Siva, 'in remembrance of his youth'; those were the words in his will. You must have seen the image in his studio in the old days."

Marie remembered it, also Fancourt's passion for India. "Is the figure here?" she asked.

Ted shook his head. "It was a magnificent bronze; not very large, but the genuine article. I sold it, not very long ago, to a vulgar war profiteer, a chap who wanted antiques to match the ancestral home and family portraits he'd bought up cheap."

"Fancourt never married," Esmée interposed hurriedly, anxious not to dwell on the sale, which she thought might be painful to Marie, and displayed Ted in an unfavourable light.

So Donald had gone, and his Siva was in the hands of strangers. Marie groaned mentally. Vronsky with his here-and-now policy, and his slave-driving propensities, that allowed his employés no time to dwell on the

past, would be infinitely preferable to this awakening of old memories.

After lunch, for the simplicity of which meal she apologized, Esmée proposed that Marie should take the studio flat furnished. Ted and his wife were compelled to leave London on a business trip, and Esmée suggested that on their return Marie could remain on in the flat as a paying guest. Esmée dilated upon the delights of the projected *ménage-à-trois*, which Marie contemplated with horror. To help Esmée, however, rather than from inclination, Marie promised to rent the flat furnished during the owners' absence, and all details were soon arranged.

As Marie was about to leave, there was a ring at the bell. "It's Horace Shrewsbury," said Ted, showing the newcomer into the studio.

"Don't go," whispered Esmée to Marie. "You must remember Shrewsbury. He'll be delighted to see you."

Shrewsbury had grown into a tubby little man, but his alert expression belied the weight of flesh and of years.

"Do you recognize her?" said Esmée. "It's Marie Drayton. You and she used to be pals in days gone by."

"Marie Drayton, of course I'd have known her anywhere," replied Shrewsbury effusively, delighted to claim acquaintanceship with so elegant and interesting-looking a woman as Marie.

Marie was tempted to gratify her vanity by telling Shrewsbury she was Damaris. If she did so, she felt sure that he would swamp her with flattery, for her work with Vronsky had brought her in touch with many self-seekers of Shrewsbury's calibre. Then she banished the idea. Homage such as Shrewsbury would offer, would be too cheap to be worth obtaining.

"I'm going to leave you two together for a bit," said Esmée. "Marie, I hope you won't mind

entertaining Horace while I put the finishing touches to that sketch which he has called for."

"That's an excellent idea," said Shrewsbury to Marie. "I hope you'll entertain me. I'd love a chat with you."

Marie soon found that there was no fear of Shrewsbury putting embarrassing questions about her occupations since he had last seen her, for he was far too interested in his own doings, and too anxious to impress her with his own mental superiority, to concern himself about other people. Marie hoped that Horace, in the course of his chattering, might drop some information about Longford, for since her return to London Olga's father had often been in her thoughts. Embedded deep in the soil of her heart, there was a bulb of hope that Ralph might be glad to have her as a companion in his declining years.

Shrewsbury, however, made no allusion to Marie's erstwhile lover until Marie, in desperation, inquired about Longford.

"Funny you should have asked about Ralph," Shrewsbury answered. "I had a letter from Longford only a week or two back inviting me to spend Christmas with him."

"Where does he live?" For all her self-control Marie's voice shook.

"In Sicily. I spent three weeks in his beautiful villa there last year. I'd have liked to go again this Christmas, but there are too many people ready to snatch my job if I go away from the hub of things."

"Is his house as artistic as his old home in London?"

"Rather. It's furnished in exquisite taste. Longford's quite a king among the islanders. He's also very popular with the winter visitors, for he entertains very lavishly. Of course he can afford to do so for he's very well off, never married, and has no one to whom to leave his money."

"What about the *Star Syndicate*?"

"Don't you know? Longford sold out his interests in 1915. People said at the time that he was a fool, for halls did rattling good business during the War, when audiences were easily pleased and only wanted to have something to laugh at, in order to forget their troubles. Longford, as it proved afterwards, seized the right moment to clear out. After the Armistice, his successors had to go to a devil of a lot of expenditure to bring the halls up to date, for Ralph's policy had always been to rake in the profits, and spend the minimum on maintenance."

"Is he as active as ever? He must be getting on in years," said Marie reflectively.

"Yes, that's true, but he looks marvellously young. He's been one of the lucky ones, he has never had relations to support, and has been able to spend his money on himself. He specializes now in girl secretaries, and changes them every few months, for he's terrified of any one woman getting a hold over him. I've known quite a bunch of pretty girls who've worked for him since he settled in Sicily. He gives them a damned good time while it lasts, but manages to have a better one himself, I fancy."

"Ralph always knew how to look after himself," said Marie a trifle bitterly.

"He has turned author, and written some charmingly care-free essays and reminiscences. I'll lend you his latest volume if you like; it was very well reviewed."

"Thank you. It's always pleasant to read the works of friends."

So that was that. Marie took leave of Shrewsbury feeling that a door had been slammed in her face. There was no room in Longford's life for Marie Drayton, or Damaris, the fallen star. Now Marie's only hope was Cynthia. If Cynthia failed her, then Marie would go back to the *New Art Company*, and remain as long as Boris was willing to employ her.

The next day, Marie wrote to Cynthia and, in reply,

received a telephone message. Cynthia's voice was cordial, but she refused Marie's invitation to dinner.

"I never go out in the evening," came through, gently but firmly, "but come and dine with me instead."

Somewhat mystified, Marie accepted. Esmée had not referred to Cynthia as an invalid—yet the Cynthia Brook whom Marie remembered would only have been prevented by serious illness from visiting an old friend.

It was ten minutes past seven when, on the following evening, Marie reached Cynthia's flat.

To Marie's surprise, the maid who answered the door inquired anxiously, "Are you Mrs. Drayton?"

Marie answered in the affirmative.

"I'm so glad you've come, Madam. Miss Brook was worrying lest you'd had an accident."

It seemed odd to Marie that a few minutes' delay, caused by the bungling of a taxi driver, should be a cause for anxiety. Then she reflected that Cynthia's condition, in which molehills appeared mountains, must be serious indeed. Despite her apprehensions, Marie was horrified at the change in her friend. Cynthia's hair was quite white, the veins on her neck protruded like whipcord, and she was dressed in sweeping black velvet that emphasized her out-of-date appearance, at an era when skirts were worn several inches off the ground. Cynthia was, obviously, a piece of the world's cracked porcelain.

"Waiting for death!" Boris's gruesome words flashed across Marie's mind, as she kissed Cynthia's bony cheeks.

"I was so afraid you'd had an accident, my dear," the older woman remarked.

"I'm awfully sorry I'm late, but the taxi man lost his way."

"Never mind, it can't be helped. We'll dine at once though, if you don't mind. Mabel, my cook, likes to get away by eight o'clock."

Marie regretted that she had given her friend the trouble of preparing a dinner, for Cynthia ate only invalid food. Marie tried to remember that her hostess was only between fifty and sixty, for, when compared with Sonia Stanin, Cynthia might have been a hundred.

Cynthia monopolized the conversation, as though, unable to concentrate in silence, she had contracted the habit of thinking aloud. Marie made no attempt to talk, but from the welter of Cynthia's remarks, she learnt that the War, with its stern realities, had deviated funds, interest and sympathy from Cynthia's fancy rescue work. In 1915, Cynthia had closed down her home and taken up national service. Her sensibilities and refinement had been badly bruised by contacts with girls far more amoral, she considered, than any she had helped in pre-War days. Her feelings had been still further jarred, when she found that many of the girls and women who snapped their fingers at conventionality were of her own class.

Cynthia begged Marie to come and live with her, so that together they might recapture the threads that had slipped through their fingers. But again, and yet again, Boris's words, "Waiting for death!" rang in Marie's ears. No, however much she loved Cynthia, and however great her distress at Cynthia's decay, Marie resolved never to attempt to turn the mill of life with the water that had passed.

A few days before Christmas, Marie took up her abode in Esmée's flat and, on Christmas Eve, scanned the advertisements of Christmas revels. *Yuletide Gala Night at the Lombardy Café: Christmas Eve Dinner at the Hotel du Prince: Christmas Tree and Dinner Dance at the Palace Restaurant.* Marie debated with herself whether she should reserve a table for one of these festivities, attire herself in her most daring costume, and seek forgetfulness in adventure. Forgetfulness she must have at any price; forgetfulness of the final rehearsals

of the *New Art Company*; forgetfulness of the opening night at Grafburg and—hardest of all—forgetfulness of the applause that would be earned by the successor of Damaris in *The Fountain of Bacchus*. The thought that all these things, things for long the pivot of her existence, would take place while she sat alone, forgotten, superseded, drove Marie nearly mad with irritation. What was there to stop her from plunging into adventure? Nothing. Yes, she would go out and forget. If she were “waiting for death,” she would have as pleasant a time as possible during the process. Marie seated herself at the telephone table, and was about to ring up the Lombardy Café, when the front door bell rang. Marie replaced the receiver and waited. Again the bell rang, this time more forcibly than before.

Marie opened the door without troubling to switch on the light. A man on the threshold asked for Miss Lane, and seemed very disappointed when Marie told him that Esmée would be away for at least a month.

“Can I give Miss Lane a message? I’ll be writing to her to-morrow when I forward letters. She’s in the north of England.”

“That’s awfully nice of you. If it isn’t any trouble, you might enclose this card, and say that Tom Rayner called, and was very disappointed not to see her. I ought to have let her know beforehand of my arrival in London, but I only landed in England yesterday.”

Marie took the card. Should she reveal herself to Tom, or let him pass without halting across her path? She hesitated a moment, then, impelled by her utter loneliness, she said, “Tom, don’t you recognize me?”

Rayner started violently. “I seem to know your voice,” he said, puzzled, “but the girl you remind me of has been absent from England for umpteen years. She may be dead for ought I know.”

“What’s her name?”

“It is, or was, Marie Drayton.”

"Well, I'm Marie Drayton."

"Marie, my dear!" Rayner clasped both Marie's hands in his.

"Won't you come in and sit down?"

"With pleasure, but turn on the light. I can't distinguish your features."

Once they were seated, a great shyness stole over Tom. He suddenly recalled the gloves he had caressed on the night, so many years ago, that Marie had refused him. He had them still, those gloves. Yellow and stiff with age they had become, and he had often thought of throwing them away, for he was ashamed of sentimentality. Yet, somehow, they were still safe in his cash box.

Marie was hungry for admiration. It had become a staple article of her mental diet, and since the supply had ceased she felt as exhausted as a drunkard debarred from alcohol. She soon found that the embers of Rayner's admiration were still warm, and she applied the bellows. Christmastide, loneliness, unfamiliarity with a London that had turned topsy-turvy since their last sojourns in the capital in pre-War days, linked Marie and Tom together. Marie gladly accepted Rayner's invitation to dine with him every night during the festive season. Before long Marie found herself under the necessity of telling Rayner something about her occupations since their parting. She made no concealment of her travels, explaining that, owing to the War, she had been unable to obtain sufficient concert work to keep her in funds, and had toiled as a vocalist in touring companies, chiefly in North and South America. She explained that her retirement was due to her loss of voice, which she had overstrained by hard work.

One day, early in the New Year, Tom looked very glum, and for a long time sat silent. Marie had learnt that all attempts at conversation with Rayner were useless when, as now, he had something on his mind. At

last he asked Marie abruptly, "What are your plans?"

"I haven't any at the moment. What are yours? I think you said that you don't return to India till next October."

"Well, this morning I've received an offer from the India Office, which'll necessitate my speedy return to 'The Shiny,' if I accept it."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm not quite sure. The Government suggest I should take a temporary job in Ghanapur State. I've been there before. The Raja's an awful decent chap, and as we got on well together I expect he's applied for me by name. The post is well paid, and as living's cheap in Ghanapur, for there's nothing there to spend your money on, it's really a very profitable proposition. The job, too, 'd see me through to the end of my service, for I've only a couple of years to go before taking final leave prior to retirement."

"It sounds too good to be refused."

"You're right. The infernal part is that I don't want to return to India at once."

"How soon would you have to leave?"

"I oughtn't to be back later than the middle of February, earlier, if possible. It's already the second week in January, so I'd have to sail from Marseilles in a fortnight. Of course, there'll be no trouble about getting a passage out at this season, because it'll be warming up by the time I arrive back in India, and people'll be crowding back to Europe."

Again there was a silence, broken eventually by another abrupt question from Tom. "Marie, forgive me asking you, but is there any man in your life to whom you're attached?"

Marie shook her head.

"Well, dear I'm still waiting for you. Will you come to India as my wife?"

After a pause Tom added, "I know I'm not half good

enough for you, but, as I told you twenty years back, I'll never marry anyone but you."

"Thank you, dear," Marie whispered.

"Years ago, you placed work before marriage. You told me on account of your career that you couldn't marry. It seems to me that now you've had your fill of work. Won't love and companionship be better than loneliness?"

Marie debated with herself. Should she tell Tom of Olga and Damaris? She begged for time before giving a reply, but Rayner pursued the subject of matrimony.

"Well, Tom dear," said Marie, finally, "before I accept you I must tell you the complete story of my life. It wouldn't be fair to you if I concealed anything that might afterwards prove a barrier between us."

Tom crushed Marie in his arms, kissing her with reverential fervour. "Marie my darling, if you'll agree to marry me, that's all I want. I trust you absolutely. You haven't inquired about my past, so why should I inquire about yours? It's sufficient to know that you're willing to be my wife."

"Still, Tom——"

"Still, what darling?"

"Well, you know I'm not a young girl. I've been touring the world for years, and have rubbed shoulders with all sorts and conditions of people."

"I'm not young either. You look so beautiful that I'm almost afraid I'm too old to be your husband. However, one thing's certain. I'm not such a fool as to expect that a woman of forty is as inexperienced as a girl of eighteen. I know you well enough to realize that you're the one woman whom I want for a lifelong companion. If you were a child just left school I'd never think of asking you to marry a man of fifty-two. It'd be madness." Tom fiddled with his pipe, wasted half-a-dozen matches trying to light it, and then put it back in his pocket with a sigh. By nature he was far from

talkative, he doubted his own powers of persuasion, yet there was something on his mind, which he felt Marie must hear, as it might determine her to decide in his favour. "When I look back, I often think I must have seemed beastly callow when I had the audacity to propose to you at Staines. You see dear, when I was a youngster, 'good form' didn't sanction over-much sympathy with the Indians, and I tried to copy my companions' remarks and view India through their spectacles. I hope I've grown wiser. Anyway, nowadays, without being unpatriotic, or treading on my English neighbours' corns, I try to show sympathy with the Indians. A stay of a year or two in India I'm sure would interest you, and with your brains and artistic tastes you'd soon get to love the country and the people."

To Marie, Tom seemed to be more congenial now than on the previous occasion when he had proposed to her. Would it not be better to have him as a permanent companion, to devote her life to making him happy, than to drift on aimless and alone?

"Marie dearest, say you'll be my wife," Tom pleaded. "I'll do my best to make you happy, and supposing you didn't like India, after all, I could chuck before the end of my time."

"Very well Tom, I agree. But remember that, at any time, if you want me to tell you about my past, I'll do so."

Another embrace and Tom returned to practicalities. He was emotional, but, terrified of making a fool of himself if he voyaged in the deep and, to him, unfamiliar waters of romance, he hurried back to the *terra firma* of commonplaces. "To-morrow we'll get busy about our wedding and our passages," he said. "Which do you prefer, a slap-up show, with orange blossom, a cake and all the damned rest of it, or a quiet wedding?"

"The quieter the better. Esmée and Cynthia are the only people I'll invite."

"Right ho. I'll fix up things then at a registry office. Like you I've lived so long abroad that I've lost touch with all the people I used to know here."

That night as they dined together to celebrate their engagement, Tom exclaimed, "Marie, I've a brain-wave! Why shouldn't we go to Grafburg for our honeymoon and sail for Bombay from Trieste? It'd be just wonderful to hear with you again the operas we listened to when we were young together. You remember how your father insisted upon your going to operas when I thought you ought to be in bed?"

Marie's hand trembled so much that she was obliged to replace on the table the glass that she had lifted to her lips. "O Tom," she gabbled nervously.

"Don't you think it's a topping idea?" Warming to his subject, Tom was all unconscious of Marie's distress.

Grafburg, Vronsky, the *New Art Company*, danced before Marie's mental vision. Despite the warm, smoke-laden atmosphere, Marie felt chilled, her heart thumped and she feared that she would faint. If her past arose and confronted her on the first day of her engagement, how could she marry Tom without telling him her life story? Her head throbbed, her lips felt dry and cracked, her teeth began to chatter, soon Tom would be bound to notice her dismay. She determined to state at once her reason for wishing to avoid Grafburg. Whatever verdict Tom pronounced she would accept it without argument. If the man who was her fiancé were horrified at her past, then it would be infinitely better for him to know of it, while there was yet time for him to withdraw from his undertaking to marry her. Therefore she regained her self-control with a supreme effort, and in low, earnest tones told Rayner of Longford, of Olga, of Petrovka, of Damaris.

Honest with herself, Marie imagined that Tom would be equally honest with himself. It never entered into her

head that Tom, in his anxiety to play the game, might compromise with his own emotions and express a sympathy with her sufferings which he did not feel. Yet this is precisely what Tom did. Rayner had declared that he was willing to become Marie's husband without knowing her past. He argued to himself that he could not go back on his word without appearing a cad in his own, if not in Marie's, eyes. Yet Tom knew that his feeling towards Marie changed, even as he learnt of Damaris the naked dancer, who had been so successful that, for fifteen years, men had feasted their eyes upon her unclad body. Tom jumped to the conclusion that Vronsky's audiences had consisted chiefly of men who had paid Damaris lavishly for private, close-up views of her physical charms. That such a woman was to become his wife—the idea terrified Tom. His prejudiced eye could distinguish no difference between his companion and the obvious cocottes at adjacent tables. He dared not look at Marie, lest his thoughts might be betrayed on his countenance. Yet he must break the silence that weighed upon them both like a load. What could he say? After a pause during which, so it seemed to him, his entire outlook with regard to his future had been changed, he raised his glass, "I drink to the recovery of Olga, my future step-daughter," he said.

Marie's face relaxed. "Tom, how good you are!" she murmured. Her hand shot across the table and caressed Rayner's sunburnt paw.

The touch of Marie's fingers recalled to Tom the night on which he had so wistfully stroked his cheeks with her gloves, and a thrill went through him. At the moment, wilfully ignoring the fact that to be dishonest with oneself is quite as wrong as to be dishonest with one's neighbour, Tom felt recompensed for his self-deceit.

"Do you really think there's a chance of my finding Olga after all these years?"

“Nothing in the world’s impossible, my dear. And now we won’t dwell on the past, but on the future, on the new life which, I trust, has much joy in store for both of us.”

The next day Tom suggested that they should abandon all idea of a visit to Grafburg, and the day after their marriage they travelled to Marseilles, where they embarked for India. During the journey to Ghanapur Rayner coached Marie in the rôle she would be required to fill as the wife of a senior civilian. Marie took all her husband’s admonitions in good part, for she realized that they were due to Tom’s fear of her betraying her past. She trusted that in quiet Ghanapur, where she and Tom would be much in each other’s company, he would lose all fear of Damaris emerging from beneath the cloak of respectability worn by Mrs. Rayner. Her hopes were shaken to their foundations when John Durrant opened the door of the Rayners’ compartment, as their train stopped at Kotibagh Station.

CHAPTER XIX

A LEADING HOSTESS OF NEW YORK

TOM RAYNER made his formal call at the palace on the morning after his arrival in Ghanapur. The Raja named the hour, and Durrant was present during the interview. His Highness received Tom with great courtesy and introduced him to Krishnamurti, at that time the minister in charge of public works.

"Krishnamurti," said the Raja, "will give you a list of the schemes we propose to commence, and I agree with him that you'd better make a short tour of the State at once, so that while you're studying the plans and estimates you may make yourself acquainted with the actual conditions."

Rayner was pleased with the suggestion, because this would enable him to complete his inspection before the hot weather, and Marie could accompany him. If the trip were postponed, she might not be able to endure the heat in camp.

"I understand that you've brought a wife with you this time," said the Raja kindly. "I hope she'll like Ghanapur, and that I'll soon have the pleasure of making her acquaintance. If there's anything you need for her comfort, don't be afraid to ask. Durrant, I know, 'll do all in his power to make your life agreeable."

Tom thanked the Maharaja and presently withdrew, accompanied by Durrant.

"I'd much like to have a few words with you, Durrant, if you could spare me five minutes," said Rayner.

"By all means. Come into my room here. We'll be quite alone."

When he was seated in Durrant's sitting-room,

Rayner said, "I want to speak to you as man to man. My wife tells me that you knew her in Paris, and are aware of her employment with the *New Art Company*, or whatever the infernal thing's called. Naturally, both of us very much regret to find anyone in India conversant with a past we're anxious to forget, and I want to know whether we may count on your silence."

"Of course you may," returned Durrant heartily. "I'm very glad you've mentioned the matter, for I confess to a great shock of surprise when Mrs. Rayner and I mutually recognized each other yesterday at Kotibagh. You need have no fear of me, I assure you. I hope we may be friends, for there's very little society in Ghanapur, and I'd be very sorry if you shunned me."

He paused and Rayner fumbled with pouch and pipe.

"There's another thing, too," Durrant continued. "It might be extremely awkward if we weren't friendly, at least outwardly. There's Major Jones, one of the finest fellows in the world. He'd be sure to notice something, and His Highness, too, might ask embarrassing questions."

"You're quite right," said Rayner. "Thanks for the hint. I'll do my best, and so will my wife, to act as if we all met at Kotibagh for the first time."

"Then here's my hand on it," said Durrant.

"And mine."

During the next few days, Marie and Tom were busy unpacking and making arrangements for their coming tour. Because the Maharaja had expressed a wish to meet Marie, Rayner thought it advisable not to leave headquarters before consulting Durrant. The secretary urged Rayner to go on tour at once. Durrant feared that Marie's resemblance to Olga might attract the observant monarch's attention, and was anxious to put off indefinitely the meeting between Mrs. Rayner and Olga.

Marie welcomed the prospect of camp as a means of avoiding Durrant, and for the same reason was glad that

her presentation to the Maharaja was postponed. She liked their neighbour, Major Jones, who was very kind and helpful to the Rayners. Being new to India, Marie had difficulty in crediting the doctor's stories about the intrigue and corruption in which Ghanapur abounded.

"Everyone here's either spied upon or a spy, often both," the major declared. "The Ghanapuris usually spy upon each other, and bear their tales to His Highness. Even I don't escape. Hamid, my motor 'boy,' pretends not to know a word of English, but has betrayed his knowledge on more than one occasion by his intense interest in everything I say in my native language. The other day I surprised him prying into some letters I left in the car." The major laughed. "I treat it as a joke. It's the only way if one wants to live at peace. Hamid's welcome to anything he can find out about me."

Marie looked scared.

Tom, however, laughingly reassured her. "Such is life in India, especially in a native state, my dear," he remarked. "I'm sure at least one of our State servants is a palace spy, and personally, I'd back the old *chuprassi*.¹ However, it's all in the day's work and I don't care a damn what he reports."

A day later, Marie and Tom set out on tour.

Major Arnold Jones, I.M.S., to give him his full title, was a distinguished army doctor, who, before reaching the age of thirty-seven, had earned for himself a reputation for hard work and ability. He was of medium height and slim build, and had dark brown hair and light coloured eyes. He resembled Durrant much in appearance, and the principal difference between the two men lay in the doctor's rather heavy moustache and pince-nez. Owing to his defective vision, Major Jones always appeared with glasses. Being a man of energy and resource, he had been specially selected by the Government of India to clean the Augean stables, into

¹ A messenger who wears an official belt or sash known as a *chuprassie*.

which the so-called Medical Department of Ghanapur had degenerated. In addition to the hopelessly inadequate equipment of the hospitals and dispensaries, and the disgraceful inefficiency of the medical staff, the city and its surroundings were indescribably filthy and saturated with malaria. The initiation of an anti-malarial campaign was the major's first task, and in this the Raja exhibited the greatest interest.

As the ruler's tampering with State funds had stopped, at least temporarily, there was sufficient money in the Treasury for the commencement of a long delayed scheme of sanitary reform. The Raja was glad to lend his name to measures likely to restore his waning prestige and popularity, and bowed to the inevitable with a show of good grace. He knew that the retention of his throne depended upon an immediate and very great improvement in the administration of his State. He sought consolation in the thought that the reforms, although not originated by him, at least would help to realize his youthful ambition to promote the happiness and welfare of his subjects. To insure that posterity should associate him with the good works he had been compelled to initiate, the Raja determined that the new hospital and all other civic improvements should be known as the *Fatehgirji Benefactions*. The Maharaja had yet another motive for encouraging the activities of Major Jones. Malaria was rife in the palace, both the Maharaja and his wife suffered from the tropical scourge, and most of their servants and retainers had recurring bouts of fever.

Major Jones had *carte blanche*. Liberal funds were placed at his disposal, sanitary gangs were organized under experienced imported supervisors, the elimination of mosquito-breeding pools in the vicinity of the city was put in hand, and quinine was distributed gratis throughout the State. In these much needed operations, Durrant was of the greatest assistance to the doctor, and

the two men became friends. Although, happily for Major Jones, their ideas about life were entirely different, they had much in common. Both were active, intelligent, fond of sport, and keen on their work; Jones for the work's sake, and happiness in the thought of duty conscientiously performed, Durrant for the reward to be obtained. Thus the campaign energetically commenced and vigorously pursued, in a short time effected a wonderful improvement in public health.

One of the major's early patients was Durrant. Soon after the secretary's return from Calcutta, he had his first attack of malaria, and submitted to a hypodermic injection of quinine. Dr. Jones preferred this method to medicine by mouth, because quinine so administered neither affects the digestion nor the hearing. Under the needle, Durrant's fever disappeared as if by magic, and it was not long before the Raja received the same treatment. Again the needle triumphed, and a few days later, when the Rani was prostrated with one of her frequent attacks of malaria, she was induced by her husband, after much persuasion, to consult the new doctor.

Although the Raja betrayed no sign of anger, he waited impatiently for Mr. West's reply to the request for a copy of the receipt signed by Durrant for £65,000. The Prince calculated with great nicety the earliest date upon which the letter might be expected. A week in advance, he gave orders for the daily post-bag to be opened in his presence, because he was afraid that the letter from New York might not be marked "Private" and, therefore, might be intercepted by his secretary. It was only by chance that the envelope containing Mr. West's Christmas greetings reached him unopened, and the Raja decided to take no risks. To allay Durrant's suspicions, the Raja explained that he was expecting a letter from lawyers, dealing with the legal issues raised by the interference of the Government of India. This communication, naturally, would be of a very

secret nature, and the Raja wished to peruse it privately before discussing it with his private secretary.

Some mails were missed by Mr. West before he sent an answer, owing to Mr. Lindermann's reluctance to comply with the Maharaja's request. While anxious to oblige his old business friend, West, Lindermann was equally anxious not to compromise Vronsky, and took some time to consider the matter. Lindermann examined the receipt. It was written on Ghanapur official notepaper by Durrant, and bore his signature as private secretary to His Highness the Maharaja of Ghanapur. The financier guessed rightly that Vronsky had been too astute to commit himself in any way, and the more he pondered the matter, the more he was convinced that he would be doing Vronsky no harm by gratifying the Raja's curiosity. After all, the stones had been purchased in a perfectly honest way and if, as seemed likely, there had been a swindle, he would not have either the Prince, or his friend West, suppose that he, Lindermann, had any part in the plot. Moreover, when the truth leaked out, as Lindermann thought it must, he, as purchaser, would be in a very safe position if he had not connived at concealment. When West called again, to his surprise Lindermann handed him the original receipt. In return, the millionaire merely asked for an acknowledgment on the margin of a certified copy of the receipt, that West had been entrusted with the original document. West dispatched the receipt to the Maharaja immediately, and it reached Ghanapur at the end of February.

Since his return from Paris, Durrant had become almost indispensable. He had handled the inquisitive Major Jones with great ability, making no secret of the desperate medical needs of Ghanapur, while concealing the appalling graft and nepotism to which the conditions were due. In a word, so useful had Durrant become, that the Raja was half sorry when the incriminating receipt was in his hands. The Prince reflected that if he

were to dismiss Durrant he would lose a very efficient, if dishonest, servant, and, after all, thought His Highness, everybody makes a commission if he can. The Maharaja impatiently swept to the floor all the other letters, newspapers and magazines with which the post-bag had been filled, and then summoned one of his assistant secretaries to remove the litter. "Take the letters to Mr. Durrant," he commanded, "I don't want the papers and magazines, and you may send the rubbish to the *zenana* as usual."

It was unfortunate for the Maharaja that amongst the "rubbish" was a copy of the American monthly, *City and Field*, sent by Mr. West. At that time, *City and Field* contained each month portraits of *Leading Hostesses of New York*, and in the number the Prince had so contemptuously spurned was a full length photograph of Mrs. Isaac Lindermann wearing, so ran the inscription, *The Celebrated State Diamonds of Ghanapur*.

Opening the magazines and illustrated journals in preparation for the Rani's English lesson, Olga lighted upon the portrait of Mrs. Lindermann. Indeed it would have been almost impossible for her to miss the picture, because Mr. West had made blue pencil marks on the margin, and had written, "This will interest you! F.W." Breathless with excitement, Olga hurried to the Rani's room, and placed the journal before her.

"What can this mean!" cried the English girl, "His Highness gave you back your diamonds. It can't be true."

The Rani searched for her keys, which, of course, she had mislaid. When Olga had found them, the Princess opened her small safe, and removed the jewel cases. There were the Ghanapur diamonds before her.

"How well they've been imitated," said Olga, comparing the ornaments with those in the photograph. "These copies," pointing to the photograph, "must have been made while the real Ghanapur diamonds,

your diamonds, were reset in Paris. But what awful cheek to call them *The State Diamonds of Ghanapur!* His Highness'll be furious."

Meanwhile the Rani had removed the necklace from its beautiful case and had placed it on the edge of the photograph. "I'll have to clean the platinum," she remarked.

"What do you mean, Princess?"

"See, it's almost black," said the Rani.

"But, princess, platinum doesn't require cleaning. I had a platinum bracelet once and it was never dirty. That's the beauty of platinum, it never tarnishes." Olga examined the necklace very carefully. Then she exclaimed, "I see what's been done!"

The Maharani looked up, fear lurking in her eyes.

"Don't you see? Can't you see? It's you, Princess, who have the imitations. The real jewels, your jewels are there." Olga pointed to the picture once more.

"You mean——" faltered the Rani.

"I mean that the Ghanapur necklace and bracelets were sold after all. The tarnished setting has let out the secret. Now I understand why H.H. has left the necklace and bracelets here. Had the stones been real, why they'd have been put back in the strong-room long ago."

The Rani sank helplessly to the floor and began to cry.

"Don't give way, Princess dear," said Olga, squatting beside the Rani. "We've dangerous enemies. I'm sure that fiend Durrant has been behind this, and has egged on His Highness to deceive you."

"What can I do? What can I do?" wailed the Rani, tearing her hair in despair.

Having coaxed the Maharani from her tears, Olga said, "First we must be certain that the necklace and bracelets you have here are imitations. Of course I may be mistaken but I don't think so." Olga reflected, then added, "Do you remember in the *Count of Monte Cristo* that

we've been reading together, how Caderousse tested Andrea's diamond ring? He touched the window glass with it and found that it'd scratch. Let's experiment on that cut-glass scent bottle. The knob's broken but the bottle's all right." Olga made several attempts to scratch the bottle with one after another of the imitation stones, but no mark resulted. "Platinum never tarnishes," Olga repeated thoughtfully, "let me see your platinum watch bracelet, the one you wore yesterday."

The Rani produced the dainty article which Olga inspected minutely through a magnifying glass. "There isn't the least trace of tarnish on this," the girl said, handing bracelet and glass to her mistress.

The Maharani examined the watch bracelet from every angle. "I'm afraid you're right," she faltered.

"I'm sure I'm right," Olga exclaimed. "Now one more test. Lend me a real diamond, your ring'll do."

The Princess handed her ring to Olga who tried the large real brilliant on the scent bottle. A deep scratch appeared, while another trial with one of the imitation stones, as before, had no effect.

"What in the world am I to do?" whispered the Rani brokenly, wondering at Olga's cleverness.

"Write to your brother the Collector again. Your first letter may have miscarried, and whatever you do, don't tell anyone, not even Bai, about our discovery. Otherwise it'll come to the Maharaja's ears and he'll be on his guard. Also be sure and hide this magazine. You can't think how important it is. It's really the one piece of evidence you possess, unless you count the imitation diamonds."

Obedient to Olga's commands, the Rani put the copy of *City and Field* in a sandalwood box large enough to contain the periodical without folding. On top of the portrait she placed the cases containing the artificial jewels.

Pretending to be busy with lessons, the two women

drafted a second letter to the Collector. In this, they not only described the sale of the Ghanapur diamonds, and the substitution with imitations, but gave also the name of the present owner. The letter ended with a pathetic appeal to the brother for immediate action through his family, or through the Government of India. The letter and its translation into Hindi occupied the entire day, for the Rani was not given to correspondence, and required much urging by Olga before the task was completed. Then, sealed with the Rani's seal, it was dispatched to the palace office to be stamped and posted.

Although harmonious relations of a kind had been re-established between the ruler and his spouse, the embargo upon correspondence had not been lifted. The perusal by the Raja of all letters leaving the *zenana* was still a matter of course, and when the Rani's letter to her brother reached her husband's hands on the morning following its composition, the contents filled the Raja with despair. Only Durrant, he thought, could be the Rani's informant. No one else in Ghanapur could possibly know about Lindermann, and the Prince did not believe that the *zenana* women could have ascertained by themselves that the necklace and bracelets were false. The Maharaja resolved to have it out with Durrant immediately. Having prepared a series of questions with which to ply his secretary, he sent for the Englishman.

"Good morning, Your Highness," said Durrant calmly. He always experienced satisfaction when entering the Raja's study. This luxurious apartment reminded him that he, John Durrant, was a smart fellow to have acquired an entrée into it, and to have escaped from the dingy offices, and dingier theatrical lodgings, in which his previous occupations had parked him.

The Maharaja acknowledged his secretary's greeting and bade him be seated. "I've been studying the accounts you've prepared for me," commenced the ruler,

"and I find that the £55,000 paid into my London bank will soon be exhausted. In fact, now that all the bills have been settled, there's very little of it left."

"I'm afraid that's so," replied Durrant. "You see all the firms insisted upon a full payment, for they said they'd waited too long for discounts to be possible."

"I wish you and Vronsky had obtained more for the diamonds."

"I wish so too," the secretary agreed, "but Vronsky thought £55,000 a very fair offer, cash down, and you weren't prepared to wait a long time for a better."

"That's the worst of needing money in a hurry," said the Maharaja, "one has to accept any price offered. £55,000, however, really was a very low figure. After deducting Vronsky's commission and the expenses, which included your holiday in Europe, and were very heavy, little more than £50,000 remained."

Durrant wondered what was coming.

"You say £55,000 was all you could obtain?"

"Your Highness will remember that you accepted the offer, which was made through Vronsky, before I left India with the stones."

"I remember perfectly," replied the Maharaja, "but answer me truthfully, what price did Mr. Lindermann actually pay?"

Good actor that he was, Durrant could not altogether hide his fear that the Raja had somehow learnt the truth.

"Surely Your Highness cannot believe——" he began.

"From my experience of men," returned the Maharaja interrupting, "I can believe anything. Surely you can answer a straightforward question. How much did Mr. Lindermann pay you for my, or, to be exact, my wife's, necklace and bracelets?"

"£55,000," came Durrant's answer, smooth and glib.

"Then how can you explain this document?" asked the ruler, lifting his blotting-pad, and revealing the

receipt, which, for protection against snatching, he had placed under the glass with which the writing-table was covered.

Durrant stared at the paper.

"It's in your handwriting, and I don't think you'll dispute the signature."

Confronted with the unanswerable evidence of his guilt, the secretary remained silent.

"Have you nothing to say?"

"I was tempted by Vronsky," Durrant stammered.

"Then you admit that this receipt is yours, and that you actually received £65,000?"

Durrant nodded.

"What did you do with the £10,000?"

"Vronsky took it."

"Can you prove that?"

Durrant hesitated.

"Don't try to concoct another lie," said the Maharaja.

"This receipt, which you admit to be yours, convinces me that you're a thief as well as a liar."

The secretary stepped forward with clenched fists.

"I've aid at hand," said the Prince, observing Durrant's attitude. "You'll hardly be so foolish as to provoke a scene."

Durrant moved towards the door.

"We must finish this discussion," said the Raja quietly. "Please resume your seat."

"I prefer to stand."

"And I prefer you to be seated."

Durrant seated himself.

"That's better. Now perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me exactly what did occur?"

"I now have no alternative, Your Highness. I was and, in fact, still am, in debt. Your Highness will admit that during the seventeen months I've been in your service, I've never received my promised salary of two thousand rupees a month, only small sums on account, at

odd intervals, to keep me going. That's why I fell to Vronsky's temptation, and shared the £10,000 with him."

"So you confess to having robbed me of £5,000?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Where's this money?"

"I spent it paying my debts."

"Can you prove this?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

"We'll look into that later and I'll also write to Vronsky. Am I to understand that you paid him £5,000?"

"Yes."

"Doubtless you've his acknowledgment in some form?"

"I'm afraid not, Your Highness. All I can suggest is that you obtain confirmation from the bank. I instructed the manager of the bank in Paris to transfer £55,000 to your account in London, £5,000 to Vronsky's theatre account, and the other £5,000 I myself used as I've explained."

"You've no receipt or used cheque to explain Vronsky's share in this robbery?"

"No, Your Highness."

"Up to this moment," said the Raja in a sarcastic tone, "I thought that an English gentleman—and I took you for one—was the soul of honour. But you're no better than a nigger, which, no doubt, you call me behind my back. Anyway, on your own showing, you're a liar and a thief."

"After this, Your Highness, I can't remain in your service."

"Not so fast, not so fast," returned the other. "I don't accept your resignation, if that's what you mean. On the contrary, I propose to keep you in my service until your debt's paid. You're not free to leave me until you've returned me my £10,000, or worked off the money in lieu of salary."

Durrant did some mental arithmetic. "That'd take six years," he said.

"Longer," replied the Raja. "I'd have to give you a small allowance during the period, and that, of course, would reduce your monthly contribution to the fund into which the balance of your salary'd be paid."

"I refuse to remain on these conditions."

"As you please, but you'd find existence here less tedious than in jail I imagine. As you know, I was anxious to conceal the sale of Her Highness's jewels, but, if you drive me to extremities, I'll put my pride in my pocket and send for the police."

"But Your Highness wouldn't dare! And besides, what about the English girl?"

"What about her?"

"The public'd know how you've ill-treated her."

"I'd advise you, Durrant, to keep silence about the English girl for your own sake, rather than for mine. The public might also learn about the way in which you seduced and sold her, and conduct such as yours wouldn't find favour with a British jury."

Thoroughly cowed, Durrant sat with bowed head. "Is that all, Your Highness?" he said.

"No. When I mentioned just now that I might be forced to admit publicly the sale of Her Highness's jewels, I find you've forestalled me. Through you, Her Highness the Maharani knows the truth."

"Through me?"

"Yes, through you. It's no use telling more lies. Besides myself, you're the only person in Ghanapur acquainted with Isaac Lindermann, and, therefore, in a position to inform the Maharani of his existence. How else, I ask, could Her Highness have heard of him, except through you?"

"Her Highness knows?"

"Yes. This is the letter which she wrote yesterday to her brother, and which I intercepted." Slowly

translating into English, the Maharaja went through the letter written so laboriously by his wife.

"I swear that Her Highness never learnt all that from me."

"I don't believe you," said the Maharaja dryly. "I've convicted you of a number of deliberate lies already, not to mention theft. However, if, as you say, you've not communicated with my *zenana*, that's to say, with your darling little Olga, perhaps you'll suggest who did."

"I can only repeat truthfully that I've had no communication whatsoever with Your Highness's *zenana*."

"I've arranged to see Her Highness the Maharani this afternoon," said the Prince, "and doubtless shall ascertain the truth. Therefore, you'd better confess. It'll save time."

"I've nothing to confess."

"We'll see," said the ruler. "Now you may go."

When the Rani was apprised of her husband's proposed visit, her heart was in a flutter. She clasped Olga to her breast as if for protection. "Hira, I'm so frightened," she wailed. "His Highness must have heard of our discovery that the diamonds are false. Otherwise, why should he come here to-day? What shall I say? What shall I do?"

"Be brave at all events," replied Olga, wishing she could imbue the poor little Princess with some of her own courage. "Try to show His Highness that you're not afraid of him. Your brother, the Collector, should be here soon, and if he's the man you describe, he'll fight your battles for you."

"I wish I had your brains, Hira," sobbed the Maharani. "You must tell me exactly what to say and do."

Olga considered the situation. If only she could receive the Raja herself, she thought, and spare her mistress the coming interview.

"You must act as though you thought the diamonds

were real, and if the Raja's coming to talk about them, let him introduce the subject. If he asks for them, let him have them, so that he may think you agree with him that the stones are too valuable to be kept in the *zenana*. Mention no word of our suspicions, and say nothing of Mrs. Isaac Lindermann of New York. Mind, too, that you don't let him see the American newspaper. If you do let the cat out of the bag, I feel convinced that His Highness'll take steps, somehow or other, to prevent your brother from coming here."

"I can't act," sighed the Rani.

"Of course you can, and must. Listen, suppose that I'm His Highness and try to answer my questions."

For two hours, Olga and the Princess rehearsed the coming scene. Olga, as Raja, plied the Rani with likely questions, to which she dictated the Rani's replies. Strings of beads represented the necklace and bracelets, because the Rani was sure she would fail to act her part, and would betray her emotion, if the imitation jewels were on view. Olga doubted whether her directions would be followed, but hoped for the best.

The preparations in the *zenana* were on the usual scale, but, in accordance with Olga's advice, instead of wearing robes of mourning, as on the Maharaja's previous visit, the Maharani decked herself in a magnificent *sari*, and all the jewellery her small person could accommodate. Olga argued that the Maharaja, who had been surprised to see his wife in the sombre raiment of bereavement, would be less likely to suspect that she knew of his deceit, if she wore gay apparel. Both Olga and her mistress forgot that the costume and ornaments selected by Her Highness emphasized the absence of the Ghanapur necklace and bracelets, which should have been the crowning features of the Princess's gala dress.

Having settled himself on the Persian rugs and cushions that adorned the divan, the Maharaja accepted the Maharani's prostrated homage and assisted her to rise.

In the flowery language of the East he complimented her upon her appearance, and, one by one, examined her costly ornaments, debating in his mind how to broach the subject of his visit. He hoped that his lady would give him the necessary opening, but waited in vain. At last his patience failed. He cleared his throat and began, "As ever you look very beautiful in your well chosen *sari* and jewels, but where are your famous diamond necklace and bracelets about which, to tell the truth, I've been very anxious? They're too valuable to be carelessly handled, and should have been returned to my strong-room long ago."

In reply to this question, which Olga had anticipated, the Rani should have stated that the precious jewels were quite secure in her safe, and that the Raja need have no concern about them. Instead, she maintained a glum silence and the Maharaja had to repeat his question several times. At last, thoroughly frightened, and forgetful of her lesson, the Maharani said, "There's no need to guard things of small value."

"Of small value? What do you mean of small value?" echoed the Raja. "Your famous diamonds, now, through our happy union, the diamonds of Ghanapur, of small value?"

The Princess, of course, should have admitted the stupendous value of the Ghanapur diamonds, but had insufficient wit to cover her initial mistake. She faltered, yearned for Olga's assistance and again was mute.

"Since you don't value our great treasures, at least you'll return them to me."

Here the Rani should have produced the sham diamonds as though they were the priceless heirlooms, and should have handed them to her husband with feigned reluctance. Instead, ignoring all Olga's instructions, she stammered with rising tears, "The diamonds that formed part of my dowry are of great value, but, alas! they're not here."

"Not here!" cried His Highness with well feigned astonishment.

"Alas, no!"

"But I brought them to you myself," protested the ruler. "Have they been stolen?"

The conversation had now passed quite outside the scope of Olga's lesson.

"Have the Ghanapur diamonds been stolen?" repeated the Maharaja.

The Maharani began to weep.

"Answer my question," commanded her lord.

"Who but a fool would be tempted by glass?" stuttered the Princess between her howls.

"Glass. What do you mean?"

"I mean——" replied the Maharani, "I mean that the jewels you entrusted to my care are worthless imitations. They're not my diamonds which I brought here on our marriage."

"And who told you that?"

"The jewels themselves. The necklace and bracelets you brought here on your last visit are glass copies of the originals."

"And what has caused you to imagine this foolishness?"

"The metal setting."

"The metal setting? Explain."

"You told me the setting was platinum."

"And I spoke truly."

"Then you yourself have been deceived. The setting of the diamonds, which also are false, has become dark with tarnish."

"Tarnish?"

"Yes, tarnish. Unlike my watch bracelet which, being of real platinum, is never dull and never needs cleaning, the settings of the jewels you brought me have lost all their lustre." The Maharani detached her watch bracelet and handed it to her husband for his inspection.

"See, this is always bright, and although I wear it nearly every day, never needs polishing."

The Raja cursed inwardly.

The Maharani continued, "When I discovered that the settings were not real platinum, I thought that, perhaps, the stones also were false. Real diamonds scratch glass, while false, or glass, diamonds won't. See I can scratch this scent bottle with my ring." She suited the action to the word and held up the bottle for inspection. "Your false diamonds, on the contrary, make no impression on the glass."

"Let me try," said the Maharaja.

The Maharani handed her spouse both bottle and ring.

"I mean let me try with the diamonds that you say are false."

"By all means; I'll get them at once." The Princess waddled from the apartment and presently returned with the sandalwood box, which Olga had instructed her not to produce. Like the rest of the lesson, this advice had been ignored. The Prince opened the box and removed the large case containing the necklace.

"Didn't I tell you the truth?" said his wife. "See the metal's black with tarnish, and the diamonds——" this with a sneer, "test them yourself, you've the bottle."

The Maharaja tested one stone after another, hoping that the additional pressure of his man's strength would accomplish a scratch of some sort on the bottle of hard flint glass. His efforts, however, produced no result. He hesitated for something to say, then, after a few moment's reflection remarked, "You've raised suspicions in my mind, which only my Paris jewellers can allay. I'll put the jewels in my strong-room and make arrangements for their dispatch to France."

"You're welcome to them," said the Rani.

The Raja lifted the two smaller cases, and thus uncovered the portrait of Mrs. Isaac Lindermann, which the Princess had entirely forgotten.

"Who's this?" inquired the Raja, as he removed the periodical and held it to the light.

The Maharani now realized her mistake, and attempted to snatch the paper from her husband's hands. Then, exhausted with the interview and her attempts at play-acting, she collapsed on the floor.

Having learnt how the name of Mrs. Isaac Lindermann had been introduced into his *zenana*, the Prince blamed himself for his own negligence. He realized that he had falsely accused Durrant. "We must talk this over," he said, bending over his wife, whom he hoped to conciliate with a show of compassion.

"Leave me," the Princess screamed. "You like your imitation diamonds, are false." Her heels commenced to beat the floor as her fit of hysteria developed. The more her husband tried to pacify her, the more strident did her shrieks and insults become. She called the Maharaja liar, cheat, thief, whoremonger. She yelled threats of appeal to her family, to her brother, to the Government of India, and her cries brought her women flocking into the room.

Stamping with rage, the Maharaja left his wife's apartments, bearing with him the imitation diamonds and the copy of *City and Field*.

CHAPTER XX

A CURE FOR MALARIA

BACK in his room, the Raja placed the jewel cases on his table and commenced walking to and fro. That cursed paper had revealed the truth. His only consolation was the thought that there could not be many copies in India, and it was hardly likely that the number before him could fall into the hands of his wife's relations. They were the people he most feared, especially his infernal brother-in-law, who was bound soon to come to Ghanapur, for a visit from the Assistant Collector was long overdue. Somehow or other that termagant of a Maharani must be silenced before her brother's arrival.

The Prince's subtle brain worked quickly under the influence of fear, and evolved two alternative plans of campaign. If the first, based upon persuasion, were to fail, the second, based upon force, would be adopted. The first could be attempted at once, and the Raja hoped that the alternative would be unnecessary. However, before making any decision, he must consult Durrant, and he decided to do so that same evening after dinner.

"I saw Her Highness this afternoon," the Raja began, "and I must apologize for accusing you of being her informant about the diamonds. This is how she learnt about Mrs. Isaac Lindermann of New York." The ruler handed Durrant the number of *City and Field*.

"The devil!" exclaimed Durrant. "How on earth did she get hold of this paper?"

"I sent it to her myself," answered the Maharaja grimly. "It arrived yesterday morning by the same

post as your receipt for the £65,000. I was very worried, as you may suppose, and had no inclination for the newspapers which I sent to the *zenana* unopened."

"Couldn't you assure Her Highness that the jewels worn by Mrs. Lindermann are merely copies of the Ghanapur necklace and bracelets? You could pretend to be very annoyed at the unauthorized use of your name."

"That'd be no use," said the Maharaja decisively, "the Maharani already knows that those things are false." He pointed to the cases on the table.

"How on earth did she find out?"

"Never mind how she did so. The fact remains that she has done so."

"Your Highness'll remember that I warned you of the danger of allowing Olga Petermann the run of your *zenana*."

"What do you mean?"

"Without Olga, I'm sure Her Highness would never have discovered the deception."

"Maybe you're right." In a flash the Maharaja remembered the platinum bracelet he had presented to Olga, and how he had told her that platinum never tarnishes.

Durrant lifted the necklace from its satin bed. "I, of course, am no expert," he remarked reflectively, "but this necklace seems all right to me."

"The trouble is," said the Maharaja, "that now the Maharani knows the truth, she can't be deceived about those damned bits of glass. Why the story must be all over the *zenana* by now. When I left her, she was indulging in a fit of hysteria, shrieking vengeance and abuse at me. Her women who were present heard every word."

"So long as the story doesn't go beyond the palace I suppose it doesn't matter much," said Durrant.

"And how am I to prevent the story going

abroad?" demanded the Raja petulantly. "If I could only silence the Maharani's confounded tongue, things might become all right, but Her Highness is certain to scream her complaints against me every day, so that the story'll never have a chance of dying down, and will reach her family. I've many dishonest servants"—here Durrant winced—"servants who'd be glad to earn a bribe by selling my wife's people the truth."

"Perhaps after a few days——" Durrant began.

"Don't you see that I can't afford to wait a few days, not even a few hours? My infernal brother-in-law, the Collector, may be here at any time, and when the Maharani tells him I've sold her diamonds, there'll be the devil of a row." The Raja, who had been pacing the room, now seated himself at his desk. He wondered what his secretary would think of his first scheme, and found it necessary to take a sip of water before commencing. "Do you think Olga Petermann could help?" he asked Durrant. "The Maharani seems very fond of her and the two seem to be very close friends. I might be able to win Olga to my side by restoring her to favour without any attempts at love-making. She could have the use, not of the rooms next to mine, but of the guest suite she occupied when she first arrived here with the Wests. She could bang the piano all day long, and make as much noise as she liked," added the Prince with sardonic humour, "if that would enable me to enlist her sympathy and assistance."

Durrant betrayed fright at this suggestion. He reflected that, by an extraordinary fatality, Olga's mother, now Mrs. Rayner, had come to Ghanapur, and Olga's emergence from the *zenana* probably would result in a chance meeting between mother and daughter, which, by every means in his power he must prevent.

Noticing Durrant's anxious expression, the Maharaja asked, "Are you afraid to meet your sweetheart?"

"To be candid, I am," Durrant replied. "I admit that

my conduct with Olga was vile, but Your Highness'll concede that what I did was in your interests."

"You've a glib tongue," said the Raja, "and, as usual, are quite prepared to justify your crimes, lying, theft, seduction, abandonment. However, I'd not put your chivalry to the test of a meeting with the girl you prostituted. You could move into other rooms, or, better still, into one of the guest houses."

"I'm not thinking so much of my own peace of mind as of the almost certain failure of your proposal."

"Why failure?"

"Because, for one thing, if Olga Petermann's the girl I take her to be, she'll not easily be induced to forsake a friend. For another, it'd take time for you to win Olga to your side. Moreover, if she did agree to use her influence with the Maharani on your behalf, it'd probably take still longer for Olga to change the attitude of the Princess towards you." Durrant drew his chair towards the table at which the Maharaja was seated, and said with great earnestness, "I feel certain it was through Olga that Her Highness discovered our deception. Consequently, Olga'd have to contradict every statement she has made. Further——" Durrant paused.

"Go on," said the ruler.

"I was about to hint that Her Highness, being an Indian, and therefore, very suspicious, would smell a rat at Olga's entire change of front."

"I'm afraid you're right," remarked the Maharaja, shifting uneasily in his chair before disclosing his alternative project. Then he muttered, "I wish that cursed wife of mine was dead. She has never borne me a son, has never been a companion to me and is now my implacable enemy. My ministers are very anxious for me to take a second wife, to provide an heir for Ghanapur, but it'd be impossible with that ill-tempered bitch in the *zenana*. I wish to God she were dead," he repeated.

Both men were silent until roused by an elaborate

clock, which, after chiming the hour, struck eleven. Despite the heat, Durrant shivered.

"The clock reminds me that time passes," said the ruler. "Can't you suggest a way out?"

"I'm afraid not, Your Highness."

"Would the promise of money quicken your wits?"

Durrant shook his head. "I'd do much for money," he remarked, "as Your Highness knows. I'm not squeamish, but," here he lowered his voice to a whisper, "I do draw the line at murder, if that's what Your Highness means."

"I've endeavoured to explain," said the Raja, "that if Her Highness isn't effectively silenced, my name'll be mud throughout India. So far as the sale of the diamonds is concerned, I don't mind so much about the British authorities, who are interested only in the payment of my debts. But I do value the good opinion of my brother princes, and the prestige of my State. Once my wife's people hear of the sale of the Ghanapur diamonds, the story'll be common property, and my Indian creditors, imagining me to be in funds, 'll be certain to dun me for their money."

"That'd be awkward," said Durrant, "especially if the sums are large."

The Maharaja continued, "So far I've been able to conceal my Indian debts from the British Government, to whom I've given my written assurance that I've no debts other than those disclosed to the recent commission. Should Simla hear, as hear it must, if the diamond story is noised abroad, of the large sums I've borrowed from Their Highnesses," here the Maharaja mentioned the names of two neighbouring princes, "I'll probably lose my throne."

"Is it as bad as all that?" asked Durrant.

The Maharaja nodded.

"Then it'd be worth a lot to you to have the Maharani out of the way?"

"It would indeed. Since there seems to be no alternative, it'd be highly convenient if the Maharani were to die. If you, for example, would assist in bringing that about, I'd make it worth your while."

"In what way Your Highness?"

"I'd forgo your debt to me of £10,000, hand you all arrears of salary, and undertake to pay you punctually in future."

This offer startled Durrant. Cancellation of his debt, receipt of arrears of salary, future regular payment of two thousand rupees a month, taken singly, were very great temptations, and, when offered together, it would be sheer folly to refuse. He checked the items on his fingers. "Your Highness would forgo your claim against me for the £5,000 in connection with the sale of the diamonds?"

"Ten thousand," corrected the Maharaja. "Even if what you say is true, and Vronsky did take five thousand, I still hold you responsible for the ten thousand, seeing that the money was paid to you on my behalf and the receipt bears your signature as my secretary. However, there's no need to argue the point now. Yes, I'd forgo my claim against you."

"Your Highness'd give me all arrears of pay?"

"I would."

"Your Highness'd pay me two thousand rupees a month regularly in future?"

"I would."

"Then Your Highness, I agree to assist you to the best of my ability."

"Since the death of the Maharani is the only way to stay her tongue, I propose that you should poison her," said the Prince quietly.

"I? But that's impossible Your Highness. I've no access to the *zenana*, and couldn't tamper with her food."

"I don't propose anything so crude. Listen, Dr. Jones gives my wife and me, once a week, hypodermic

injections of quinine. There are twelve injections in the course and up to now I've received ten and the Maharani eight."

Durrant trembled.

"The next doses," continued the Raja, consulting a diary, "are due in three days' time, on Thursday next to be precise, and Jones is the soul of punctuality."

"Next Thursday," Durrant repeated mechanically, in a voice toneless with fear.

"Yes, next Thursday. I suggest you make up as Jones, whom you closely resemble. You're an excellent actor. Besides you look so like the doctor that with eye-glasses and moustache, even I couldn't detect the difference. I imagine you already possess them, for your make-up box and theatrical oddments were in great request at the fancy ball on the *Shah Jahan*."

"I've a pair of pince-nez," Durrant admitted, "and, of course, there's hair for moustache and whiskers in my make-up box."

"I expected you'd have them," said the Raja.

"But, Your Highness, what am I to do when disguised as Dr. Jones?"

"Listen, I'll explain. To encourage Her Highness, on the occasions of her first and second injections, I accompanied Jones to the *zenana*, and received the same treatment in her presence. At other times, the doctor, escorted by an *ayah*, has gone to the *zenana* without me. My wife's apartment is especially prepared for the doctor's visit. In order not to break *purdah*,¹ the Maharani's bed is draped with matting through which she thrusts her arm. The doctor's part of the room is well lighted, while the Rani and her attendants are hidden in the shade." The Raja paused while the clock chimed the first quarter. "That damned clock gets on my nerves," he remarked. He rose from his chair, took one or two turns round the room, then resuming his seat, he

¹ System of seclusion of Indian women of rank.

continued, "Your task next Thursday will be to slip into the *zenana* through my private entrance, and pretend to be the doctor. You'll give the Rani her injection while Jones is engaged with me. Instead of quinine, your syringe'll be charged with a special poison which I can supply. There's very little risk of discovery, because all my servants'll know that Jones is in the palace."

"But what about Olga?" asked Durrant, sick with fear.

"I'm confident that Olga, even if present in the Maharani's room, would be unable to penetrate your disguise. If I thought any useful purpose'd be served, I'd forbid Her Highness to be attended by Olga that afternoon, and'd have the girl shut up. Such an order, however, 'd only arouse suspicions, and probably prevent the success of my plan."

"But I'll need a syringe and all the other medical gadgets," said Durrant, trying to create difficulties.

To Durrant's dismay, the Raja replied, "I've thought of them also. Simple methods are always the most satisfactory. You'll use the doctor's own instruments."

"But how am I to get hold of them?"

"There'll be no difficulty about that. When the doctor has finished my injection, I'll take him to my study, and while he and I are in conversation, his instruments'll be at your disposal."

"But——" said Durrant.

"I've thought of everything," returned the other. "Please pay careful attention to what I say, for I'd like to have your criticism of my plan. As I've already told you, Dr. Jones'll arrive here on Thursday next at five o'clock. When he comes, I'll conduct him to my bedroom, where he'll prepare his instruments for my injection, and while he's doing so, I'll leave him, in order to send away all the servants from my suite, and bolt the outer door leading to the staircase. I'll instruct the *ayah* at the *zenana* door to inform Her Highness that the

doctor'll be with her in ten minutes. After receiving my injection, I'll tell Jones that my wife's unable to see him, and'll ask him to discuss with me, in my study, the plans and estimates of the new hospital, about which he has been pestering me for orders. As my study table'll be covered with the hospital plans, I'll ask Jones to leave his instruments in my bedroom. Do you follow me?"

Durrant nodded assent.

"As soon as the doctor and I are in my study, I'll summon you, as usual, by pressing this knob, which rings the bell in your room, and I'll express my annoyance when you don't appear. Directly you hear the signal, three rings, you'll proceed to the bedroom, take the doctor's instruments and pass through the private entrance to the *zenana*, where, in accordance with my instructions, an *ayah*'ll be waiting to conduct you to Her Highness."

The ticking of the clock seemed to grow louder, while Durrant coughed to conceal his fear.

"In the character of the doctor, you'll give the Maharani the fatal dose, cleanse, and pack up your instruments and return. After placing the instruments in my bedroom exactly as you found them, you'll go to your rooms and remove your disguise. You'll then unbolt the outer door that I fastened, and finally tap at the door of this room. When you enter, I'll inquire where you've been, and you'll explain your absence by mentioning an inspection of the ice plant, which I requested you to make and had forgotten."

"Your Highness has thought of every detail."

"I've endeavoured to do so. The smallest detail may be of great importance."

"The plan certainly seems feasible. Indeed, I've no criticism to offer," admitted Durrant reluctantly.

"I'm glad you're favourably impressed. I feel confident of success if you play your part properly. It will be necessary to have several rehearsals."

"Suppose the dose isn't fatal?" said Durrant.

"Don't worry about that. Once you succeed in pushing the needle into your patient's arm, death will ensue in half an hour, by which time Dr. Jones will have reached his bungalow."

They commenced straight away their first rehearsal, timing each movement with a sporting stop watch. They entered the results in a time-table, showing the exact minute at which each event should terminate. Thus :

Arrival of Major Jones at study door ..	5 p.m.
Raja receives Jones and conducts him to bedroom	5.05 p.m.
Raja leaves Jones and makes preparations, sends servants away and bolts staircase door	5.10 p.m.

"I'll remind Her Highness that the doctor'll be here next Thursday, so that your patient should be quite ready for her injection when you enter the room," said the Raja. "You'll have to act your part with the greatest care, because, although the Rani and her women are very stupid in most things, they're extraordinarily quick in their observance of details. Dr. Jones is very precise and deliberate in his actions, as no doubt you've noticed, and you must exhibit no haste."

"What about my voice?"

"You know the few Hindustani words you're likely to require, and had best speak as little as possible, and then only in a whisper. Major Jones has a very low voice; indeed, sometimes I've difficulty in hearing him."

That night and the next, the Maharaja and Durrant occupied themselves in rehearsing the murder, and Durrant was able to perfect his disguise.

On the day appointed, Major Jones injected the Prince well within the time calculated by the Maharaja and Durrant. On hearing the ruler's signal, Durrant slipped

from his room, and after obtaining the doctor's instruments, followed the *ayah* to the room in which the Rani was waiting.

Although he entered this apartment for the first time, his oft-repeated lessons had acquainted Durrant with every detail. He bowed to the Princess, who was lying on her couch, and then placed his tackle on a side table. The spirit stove was already warm, and was very easily lighted, so that the water boiled within the tested period. With an effort, Durrant controlled himself while following the routine in which he had been schooled. Sterilization of syringe and needle were accomplished by him with studied deliberation. Then he slowly filled the syringe, pretending to measure the dose very carefully with the aid of the graduations on the glass cylinder. "Now Your Highness," murmured Durrant. Hiding his fear he dabbed the outstretched arm with cotton-wool soaked in alcohol, then, pinching a fold in the flesh, introduced the needle and gently pressed the plunger.

The Rani gave a little scream, and twitched her arm, because, unlike the quinine, the poison smarted.

Durrant had some difficulty in withdrawing the needle, and had to grasp the Rani's wrist with his left hand while doing so. This action exposed his shirt cuffs with the P. and O. *Quis Separabit* sleeve-links, and Olga, the nearest of the waiting-women, recognized them.

Olga uttered an involuntary cry, and Durrant remembered the sound of her voice. As he looked up, their eyes met in mutual recognition. Aghast, Durrant dropped the syringe, which was smashed on the stone floor, and a large piece of glass from the bottom of the syringe rolled towards the bed and stopped by Olga's foot. Olga did not betray herself further. She, of course, did not understand that a murder had been committed before her eyes. Because of the curtains which, while Durrant was in the room, concealed the person of

the Rani, the effect of the poison was not observed immediately by the women attendants. Durrant, meanwhile, picked up the broken pieces of glass as well as he was able, hurriedly washed them, arranged them in the plush-lined case, and, attended by the *ayah*, made his parting bow to the Princess and departed.

When Durrant had gone, Olga removed her foot from the broken piece of glass and, for security, placed it in an empty match box.

Returning to his room, cursing himself for his clumsiness, Durrant arranged the pieces of the syringe to appear as though broken by bad packing. He shook with fright, when he missed the large piece of glass belonging to the base of the cylinder, and hoped that, if found, it might escape attention, and be thrown away. As he tapped at the Raja's study door, the clock struck six.

"Come in," cried the ruler. "I rang for you a little while ago."

"I've been inspecting the ice plant, Your Highness."

"Of course, I remember that I asked you to do so," said the Prince. Then, turning to Major Jones, the Maharaja remarked, "I'm glad to have had this preliminary talk with you. If you'll submit your complete scheme in a week's time, I'll pass orders without delay. Don't forget your instruments. Good afternoon, Jones. Durrant, please accompany the major to his car."

On his return from the palace gate, Durrant, pallid with fright, told the Raja what had happened in the *zenana*.

"What makes you think that Olga recognized you?" asked the ruler.

"Our eyes met and we knew one another."

"If necessary, she'll be silenced," said the Raja.

They waited without speaking, His Highness with an eye on the clock. Presently it chimed the half hour.

Had Durrant been able to see the Rani before he left

her apartment, he must have noticed the sudden change in her appearance. She panted for breath, her pupils became dilated, and her eyes were fixed in a glassy stare. By the time Durrant had closed and bolted behind him the door leading from the *zenana* to the Maharaja's apartments, the Princess was in a state of profound collapse and insensible. When the curtain was withdrawn, Olga was the first to realize what had occurred. Because of the Rani's knowledge of the sale of the Ghanapur diamonds, and of the Raja's fear of the trouble his wife intended to create, she had been murdered by Durrant. This was not Olga's first acquaintance with death. She had witnessed Madame Mociusko's last agony, which, although protracted, much resembled that of the Rani. Olga had had much experience of human suffering and death when a maid in the war hospital at Tannenkop. She knew that the Princess's end was at hand, and communicated her suspicions to Bai. "Her Highness has been poisoned!" she exclaimed. "It was Durrant *Sahib*, not the Doctor *Sahib*, who was here this afternoon."

"But I myself saw the Doctor *Sahib* a minute ago. I was in the veranda when the Doctor *Sahib* drove through the courtyard. His car was open, and I saw him distinctly through the veranda lattice."

"I'm certain I'm right," replied Olga, "Durrant *Sahib* knows that I recognized him."

They turned again to the dying woman, whose breathing, by this time, had almost ceased.

"God!" they exclaimed together. "Her Highness is dead!"

The cry was taken up by all the women servants, and the soldier guards at the entrance of the *zenana* wing apprehensive of serious trouble, rushed up the stairs they were forbidden to ascend, in order to quell what they thought to be a serious disturbance. One glance at the corpse was sufficient to explain the wailing. They ra-

from the death chamber, and the news flashed like lightning through the palace.

"*Maharani murgya ! -Maharani murgya !*"¹

The noise reached the Raja's apartments. "Listen !" said His Highness, holding up his hand as if to command attention. "I thought I heard a shout. Please open the door."

The dreadful suspense was over. There now could be no mistake, and presently, in confirmation, Ram Lal appeared.

"What's the matter Ram Lal?" inquired the Maharaja. "What's all this noise about?"

"The Maharani *Sabiba !* The Maharani *Sabiba !*"

"What about the Maharani *Sabiba ?*"

"*Murgya ! Murgya !*"

Ram Lal withdrew and Durrant closed the door.

"Wait here a few moments," commanded the Raja. "I must collect my thoughts before I go to the *zenana*."

The confusion caused by the Rani's death gave Olga the chance of escape for which she had been longing. She was aware too that her life was in danger, now that Durrant knew she had recognized him. Without mentioning her resolve to anyone, Olga ran to her room, and found among the relics of her European clothes a pair of old, yet serviceable, walking shoes. She hastily bundled into a handkerchief the match box, her passport and a few personal possessions, covered her face with her *sari* and ran down the stairs. No guards were on duty and, as it was now dusk, she mingled undetected among the crowd assembled in the outer courtyard, and passed unchallenged through the gate. She resolved to make her way to the doctor's bungalow and implore his help. Olga was clear of the palace, and well on her way to deliverance, when the Raja entered the *zenana*.

Motioning the women away, the Prince sat down by the bedside and took his dead wife's hand in his.

¹ The Maharani is dead.

"When did Her Highness die?" he inquired of Bai, who wept near the corpse.

"She became suddenly ill, Your Highness, after the English doctor's medicine, and died before we'd time to call him back."

Although he had himself engineered the tragedy, the Maharaja, in the presence of death, could not repress tears of genuine emotion. He cursed the circumstances that had impelled him to resort to murder. "I'll send for the Doctor *Sabib*, and question him," he said. "Meanwhile, as clearly nothing can be done, Her Highness's body must be prepared for the pyre."

The ruler passed to the veranda and ordered the soldiers in the courtyard below to summon the *guru*.¹ The Brahman priest soon appeared, and the Raja instructed him to arrange for the funeral to take place immediately. The priest, to whose interest it was to obey the Maharaja implicitly, hastened to carry out the ruler's orders, so that on this occasion, there were none of the delays, so frequently attendant upon Indian functions.

"Where's Hira?" next inquired the Maharaja.

"She was here a few minutes ago, Your Highness," answered Bai.

"Send for her. I wish to see her."

Women went in search and, in a few minutes, returned with the information that Hira was not to be found.

"Look again," cried the Raja angrily.

Again the Rani's suite was combed very carefully, but without result.

The Raja stamped with impatience. He imagined Olga to be in hiding and that the women, especially Bai, whom he distrusted, were screening her. However, the ruler's attention was diverted from Olga by the women who were removing the jewellery from the Rani's corpse. Fearful lest any of the costly ornaments might

¹ Religious teacher.

be stolen, the Raja placed them in the sandalwood box, which happened to be in the room. He then demanded the Rani's keys, and went to the Princess's small safe. This he unlocked, and transferred all articles of value to the sandalwood box. Before returning to the corpse he again questioned Bai, and was at last convinced that Olga really had escaped. The Raja was about to send soldiers in all directions to search for Olga, but again he was disturbed. The sound of tom-toms and crude wind instruments announced the arrival of the funeral party. The priests had lost no time, and had come to bear the corpse to the burning ghat. The Maharaja knew that he must hurry away and attire himself in mourning garments.

"The girl can't have gone far," the Prince muttered to himself, as he made his way back to his own apartments, "she'll be easily recaptured to-morrow." On entering his study, the ruler summoned Durrant. "Olga Petermann has escaped," the Prince remarked to his private secretary.

"Escaped!"

"Yes. I imagine that when they heard that Her Highness was dead, the guards deserted their posts, and Olga, taking advantage of the confusion, managed to get away."

"But suppose she finds her way to the major's bungalow?"

"Suppose she does."

"She'll say that she recognized me and that I poisoned the Rani."

"Suppose she does. There'll only be her word against yours, and, remember, I've a counter charge."

"A counter charge?"

"Yes. I'll accuse her of poisoning Her Highness, Olga's escape from the palace being proof of her guilt. Whatever happens, you're in a safe position, because no investigation'll be possible after the body has been burnt."

"Couldn't men be sent immediately to recapture Olga, before she reaches the guest houses?" cried Durrant, ashen with fear.

"She has had too great a start," said the Raja. "She can't possibly escape. Better wait till daylight. After the funeral I'll arrange witnesses who saw Hira administer the poison, and she'll be in my hands before noon to-morrow."

The clock struck eight.

"That damned clock again. I must hurry into mourning garments and play my part as bereaved husband. Mind you don't leave your own rooms to-night, Durrant. You'll only make a fool of yourself, and I may need you again."

While the Raja's clock announced the hour of eight, Olga reached the guest house gate. The distance from the palace along the old cart road was a little more than three miles, and this she covered in an hour-and-a-quarter. She arrived panting and perspiring. The old road was full of ruts and stones, and although downhill, the journey, to Olga, was most exhausting. She compared her present fatigue with her former enjoyment of the walk, both ways, in Durrant's company, and realized how her strength had been impaired by incarceration. As she opened the gate of number one guest house, the major, who had been reading by lamplight in the garden, rose from his chair. He was thinking of his evening bath and change of clothing for dinner.

Olga ran up the short carriage drive, and sank breathless at the doctor's feet. "Save me!" she cried.

Major Jones, astonished at the appeal in English, knelt beside the girl's prostrate body. "Bring the lamp!" he called to his bearer, who, with the other servants, had appeared as if by magic.

The bearer brought the lamp and, with its aid, the doctor saw that the half-fainting girl, although dressed in

Indian clothing, had a white skin and straw-coloured hair. With his servant's assistance, Major Jones carried Olga to a couch in the veranda, and then held a glass of water to her lips. She drank avidly, and then, partially restored, expressed her thanks. Fearful of discovery, Olga looked round apprehensively in terror of being overheard, and drew her *sari* over her face. Major Jones, observing this, ordered his servants to withdraw. All did so, with the exception of Hamid, the chauffeur and palace spy, who concealed himself within earshot, among the crotons, which, for protection against the sun, had been collected on the veranda steps.

"What's the matter? Who are you?" said the doctor kindly.

"I'm English and have just escaped from the Maharaja's palace where I've been a prisoner for over a year."

"A prisoner in Ghanapur Palace?"

"Yes. But it's not about that I've come. It's to tell you that the Maharani has been murdered."

"Murdered?"

Olga nodded. "Yes, at six o'clock this evening. Mr. Durrant, the private secretary, disguised himself to look like you and then, pretending to be the doctor, injected Her Highness with poison."

Thinking Olga to be insane, Major Jones said nothing. He again presented the glass of water and again Olga drank. Then, as her composure returned, she continued, "I recognized Jack Durrant by his P. and O. sleeve-links."

The doctor gave a start. He, too, had noticed the sleeve-links on several occasions.

"When Jack Durrant saw that I knew him, he was frightened, and dropped the syringe. It broke to pieces, on the stone floor, and I've one of the bits here." Olga unknotted her bundle and produced the match box. "Open it!" she commanded.

Major Jones obeyed and removed the piece of glass

which Olga had found on the floor. He saw at once that it had once formed part of a hypodermic syringe. In marked contrast to his usual deliberate movements, he rushed into the house, and presently returned with an open case in his hand. His own syringe was smashed and the part brought by Olga fitted. His visitor's story then was true, and explained the cries which had commenced a short while previously, and now became more insistent, as foot travellers from the palace approached the city.

"*Maharani murgya ! Maharani murgya !*"

Major Jones sent his bearer to interrogate some of the men.

The news was true. The Maharani had died that evening and was to be cremated immediately.

The doctor sniffed the piece of glass. It smelt of almonds. "Prussic acid!" he murmured. "That accounts for the rapidity of the death."

Major Jones thought for a few minutes. Then he remarked to Olga, "It's my duty to report this matter to the Government of India. Who were the other witnesses?"

"We were all present," Olga replied. "I mean all the *ayahs* and I. But it was only I who recognized Durrant."

"Can't you think of other witnesses?"

"I told Bai that Durrant, and not you, gave the Rani her injection."

"Who's Bai?"

"The chief *ayah*."

"I don't suppose she'd be much use, even if I could get hold of her. It's a great pity that you're the only witness. Can't you think of anyone else?"

Olga shook her head. She was now sufficiently recovered from her hurried journey to tell the doctor all she knew. By half-past-eight Olga had also revealed much of her own life history, some of which her passport

confirmed. Of course Major Jones would protect her to the best of his ability. He led her into his bungalow, and told the bearer to prepare dinner for two.

Meanwhile Hamid, the spy, who had heard and understood every word, hurried to the palace with a full account of the interview.

Major Jones did not know how to act. He had no telephone and when he thought of visiting the palace that night his servants were unable to find Hamid, his motor driver. On account of his weak sight, the doctor seldom drove his car, and then only by daylight. He wished the Rayners had returned from camp and, at that moment, as if in answer to his prayer, he heard the honk of a car as it turned into the Rayners' gate. The major sent a servant to inquire.

"Rayner *Sahib* and *Memsahib* come back from camp," was the information.

Jones wrote a note to Rayner. It ran as follows, "Thank God you've returned. I hope you are both well. I am in a devil of a hole and want your help. Please come over at once if you can."

As Olga emerged from the Major's dressing-room, Tom Rayner, clad in camp shirt and shorts, climbed the low wall between the two compounds, and hurried to the doctor's house.

"What's up Jones?" he cried cheerily. "We're quite well, but a fool of a cart driver managed to upset our stores in a muddy *nullah*¹, so we've had to cut the tour short by three days. This evening we had to dine on tinned biscuits and sardines, about the only things rescued undamaged. Fortunately we weren't far from the camp where we'd left the car, so were able to bump in by motor. The servants should be here with the bullock carts and what's left of our kit to-morrow morning."

As briefly as possible Jones told Rayner about the

¹ Watercourse.

murder of the Rani and Olga's escape. "I'll fill in all details presently, Rayner. But what am I to do with the girl to-night?"

"Better bring her along to our place," Rayner replied. "Marie'll look after her."

"Thanks awfully. I'll try to make her take some food first."

"Bring her over at once," said Tom. "We're bound to have some Bovril and tinned stuff in the house. The girl's more likely to be at ease with a woman. I'll nip across to our bungalow and warn the missus."

Marie rose to the occasion. By the time the major and his charge appeared, candles had been lighted in the dining-room; a place for one had been prepared; bread, butter and etceteras were in readiness, and water for soup was being heated in the kitchen over a primus stove.

While the two men talked in whispers in the veranda, Marie led Olga into the dining-room. Although the room was dimly lighted, the girl kept her *sari* drawn well over her face and sat with bowed head. She was fearful of being recognized by the Rayners' servants, and thought that palace spies might be lurking behind the many doors characteristic of all Indian bungalows. In her anxiety to convince the doctor of the truth of her story, Olga had spoken forcefully and clearly to him, once she had thought his servants were out of earshot. In the Rayners' dining-room, however, she glimpsed an old butler in the adjacent pantry and, moreover, she felt humbled and debased in this English home, which seemed to her to belong to a world of which she had no cognizance. She imagined that Mrs. Rayner might resent her intrusion and regard her as an adventuress. Olga scarcely touched the food, which she felt would choke her, and just as Marie was about to urge the girl to take more refreshment Tom entered and signed to his wife. Scared at Tom's anxious expression, Marie hurried to him.

"I must speak to you at once," he whispered. "If

the girl has finished, let her wait in your den, where she can't overhear what we're saying. It's very important."

"Very well, Tom," said Marie as carelessly as she was able. Then she returned to Olga. "Are you quite sure you've had all you want?" she asked gently.

"Quite, thank you," said Olga in muffled tones.

"My husband wants me rather urgently," said Marie, "so I'm afraid I must leave you alone for a few minutes. Come to my den, you'll be more comfortable there, for it boasts a really easy chair."

They entered Marie's tiny boudoir in which a small oil lamp was burning.

"Make yourself at home," said Marie indicating the chair. "I shan't be long."

Olga seated herself and as soon as she was alone, threw back her *sari* and allowed her eyes to wander round the small room. By the feeble lamplight, to which she gradually became accustomed, she began to distinguish her surroundings. Presently, she observed a photograph which seemed strangely familiar, and she went to the writing-table. The portrait was of Franz Liszt and, still legible after the lapse of years, was the inscription in German :

"To Paul Drayton, dear friend and gifted pupil.
Franz Liszt, Rome."

At once, Olga remembered the photograph and its plain frame. It must be the same. The name Paul Drayton proved that. How did it come to Ghanapur? Was Mrs. Rayner a signature or souvenir collector?

Olga dropped on her knees before the photograph and shed tears at the memories it evoked—her mother, Grafburg, Petroff, the Mociuskos.

Meanwhile, Marie was with her husband and the doctor on the veranda.

"Marie dear," said Tom. "I've asked you to join us because Jones thinks our young visitor's in real danger."

"In danger, Good God!" exclaimed Marie. "Danger from what?"

"The Maharaja. Listen. Jones, old man, please repeat what you've just said; it's only right we should tell Marie everything."

"Please tell me everything," said Marie earnestly. "You may count upon me to help you to the best of my power."

Jones then gave a resumé of Olga's narrative and added, "I look upon things this way. If the Maharaja's capable of murdering his wife, he's capable of anything, and we, therefore, should be prepared for the worst. Rayner and I are practically certain that my motor 'boy,' Hamid, is a spy. The fact that he's not here now suggests that he has gone to the palace to report that Miss Petermann's with us." Jones paused, he was approaching the conclusion to which his argument pointed. Then he resumed, "I expect that an attempt'll be made to-night to recapture Miss Petermann. Should she fall into the Raja's hands again, she'll probably share the fate of the Rani. If Miss Petermann's to be saved, she should be taken out of this State at once."

"How? Where?" asked Marie.

"I've advised your husband to send her away to-night by the Bombay mail. The train leaves at midnight, and with your fast car you've plenty of time to catch it at Kotibagh Station."

"I agree with Jones," said Tom.

"So do I, Tom. If you get the car ready I'll go and pack, for I must take that poor child to Bombay. I can't let her go alone."

"That's splendid of you, Marie," said her husband. "On your journey you'll probably discover what Miss Petermann wants to do. She has her passport, so Jones tells me. I suggest you buy her a ticket and send her to Europe by the first boat. You can arrange it all through our bankers in Bombay. Go straight to the Taj Mahal

Hotel, and I'll write you there what you and I've got to do. This confounded murder, and the flight of the Petermann girl, may make Ghanapur too hot for us also. The Raja's bound to learn that we helped Miss Petermann to escape."

"Mrs. Rayner, you're a brick," said Jones, shaking Marie warmly by the hand. This bluntly expressed approval made Marie glow with a certain satisfaction, such as she had never experienced, when praise had been lavished upon her in the *New Art* productions.

Meanwhile Olga was trying to determine how Liszt's photograph had reached Ghanapur. Only one explanation seemed possible—the owner of the portrait must have obtained it from her mother. At this thought, Olga's heart gave a bound. Her first instinct was to rush in search of Mrs. Rayner. Then she decided to make more careful examination of the portrait first. Rising from her knees, she fetched the lamp, and placed it on the table beside the picture. The lamp illuminated the scratch across the forehead of Liszt, which had been caused when Fancourt had knocked over the likeness in Marie's flat. Olga remembered how, as a child, she used to kiss the scratch, when she said good night to the photograph, and how she wondered what had caused this blemish. Suddenly Olga swayed. The emotions of the day had been too much for her. There was a crash. Feeling giddy, Olga had put out her hand for support and had knocked over the lamp.

At the sound, Marie, accompanied by the two men, rushed to the boudoir. When Rayner brought a light they found Olga in a fainting condition. They lifted the girl on to the sofa. Dr. Jones hastened to his bungalow for restoratives, and Marie bathed the invalid's temples.

Before the doctor returned, Olga had somewhat revived. She opened her eyes, and began to speak. Marie bent closer to catch the words. "*Maestro*, will

you please lift me up to kiss Liszt? I want to thank him for helping me to play."

The sight of Liszt's photograph had transported Olga back to her first interview with Petroff.

"*Maestro!* Liszt!" exclaimed Marie in amazement, half fainting in her turn. "Brandy!" she cried, as Olga's eyes closed again.

Rayner brought the brandy, and as soon as a few drops had been introduced between the girl's lips, Olga asked in a dazed tone, "Where am I? Where's *Maestro*? I thought I was in Petroff's studio at Grafburg. It must have been through looking at Mummy's portrait of Liszt."

"The lamp! Tom!" Marie shouted.

Tom held the lamp so that it illuminated Olga's features.

"Olga! My darling! At last!" said Marie excitedly.

"Mummy! Am I dreaming?"

"No, darling," said Marie, folding her daughter in her arms. "Liszt has brought us together."

Tom set down the lamp and left the room. Marie scanned Olga's features. There were the violet eyes that Marie had seen so often shine with inspiration. Those eyes, with their long black lashes, had not changed, but the black lines, drawn with kohl, Oriental fashion, inside the lids, gave them a curiously dilated look. There were the firmly chiselled nose, and sensitive, yet determined mouth that reminded Marie of Longford, her wonder man. There was the fair hair which, automatically, the mother began to curl round her fingers, as she had done when her daughter was a tiny child.

After a few minutes, Rayner returned, to find mother and daughter kneeling on the floor in front of Liszt's portrait, clasped in each other's arms.

Neither of the women took any notice of Tom who subconsciously, resented the arrival of the strange gi

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whose presence had driven him completely from Marie's thoughts. He felt that between himself and his wife the barrier of Marie's past would be heightened by the restoration of her child. There was no time for argument, however. Since the refugee was Marie's daughter, it was imperative, so Tom decided, that both women should leave for Europe at once.

Rayner coughed to attract notice. He then kissed Olga timidly, an action Marie ever after gratefully remembered. "It's just wonderful to have found my little step-daughter, and in Ghanapur of all places," he said. Then he turned to Marie. "Darling," he said, "I'm overjoyed at your happiness, but we mustn't let the very serious business in front of us be delayed by our delight. You must pack immediately, for there's not a moment to be lost."

Roused from her reverie, Marie hastened into her bedroom, followed by Olga.

"Hurry," shouted Tom. "Thank goodness there's plenty of cash in the house for your fares. I'm going to see about the car and petrol."

Fortunately for Marie, the luggage, on its way from camp, contained only her jungle kit, such as blouses and knickerbockers. All the clothes she needed for Bombay were in the bungalow, and she quickly found garments for Olga, with whose assistance she commenced to pack.

1305

ABAD (DN)

CHAPTER XXI

THE SAMP

THE Raja had returned from the burning ghat when Hamid, the spy, reached the palace. The motor "boy" first reported to Ram Lal, who passed on the news to the ruler.

Having heard the spy's story first hand, the Raja sent for Durrant.

"You were right, Durrant," said the Prince. "Olga Petermann has found her way to Major Jones and has told him everything. Not only that, but she has given him the piece of the syringe which you overlooked, so he now knows exactly what occurred and what poison was used."

"Good God!" White and trembling, Durrant sank into a chair.

"We'll have to deal with this damned doctor," said the Raja slowly and deliberately, "because he's about to send a report to the Government of India. His one regret, so he told Olga, is that she's the only witness. However, even as it is, Jones's report to the Government of India would be very embarrassing, so embarrassing indeed, that both Olga and the major must die. It's the only solution of the difficulty I regret to say, for they're too dangerous to live."

Durrant shivered.

"Pull yourself together man," said the Raja. "We must decide first what to do with the doctor. Once he's out of the way, Olga Petermann'll be quite easy. It's lucky the Rayners are away in camp."

With the Raja's permission, Durrant helped himself to a strong whisky and soda. The drink partially restored the secretary's flagging courage and stimulated his

brain. He turned his eyes from the light and deliberated for a few minutes. "I think I've a plan," he then remarked.

"Let me hear it," the Maharaja commanded.

"Why not entice Jones up here on some pretext? I could rearrange the white boundary stones at a dangerous curve in the *Samp*, so that the car would be driven over the *khud*."¹

"That's an excellent idea, but what pretext could we employ?"

"I suggest, Your Highness, that if you were to send Jones a private letter in your own handwriting, he might be induced to come to the palace to-night. You could say that you're feeling very ill after the shock of your wife's death and need his attention."

"I don't think much of that suggestion," returned the Maharaja. "Jones isn't quite a fool. Hamid's quite incapable of invention, and I believe every word of his tale. Jones, therefore, knows that when you poisoned the Maharani, you were acting under my orders. Probably Jones has missed his chauffeur by now, and knows that we know that he knows everything."

Durrant acquiesced in the Raja's reasoning.

"Since it's clear," pursued the Raja, "that no bait's likely to lure the doctor to the palace to-night, we must consider how to induce him to motor in this direction. Your proposed motor-car accident is much better than my first idea of a pretended dacoity, for that'd involve much bloodshed, also the admission of the police into our secrets. Let's see what all the conditions are." The Prince put on his tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles, and took up a pencil. He made notes as he continued, "The doctor knows that we know that he knows how the Maharani died. Olga Petermann's with the doctor." The ruler paused to reflect. After a few seconds' silence he resumed, "I think we may assume that

¹ Precipice.

Jones'll only use his car to-night if he has some great incentive to do so, in addition to Olga's encouragement." Again the Maharaja paused, but Durrant remained silent. "Jones is a very good doctor," the Maharaja remarked, "Now what would be likely to induce a good doctor to act?"

"An appeal for medical assistance," answered Durrant.

"I think that's a safe assumption. We must imagine then a sick or, better still, an injured man on your motor road."

Again the Maharaja and his secretary cogitated in silence.

"It's a devil of a problem," resumed the Prince, "because we must assume that Major Jones is our shrewd enemy and, therefore, likely to suspect a trap."

"You're quite right, Your Highness. Wouldn't it get over the difficulty, though, if the man who conveys the message to Jones appears to be the avowed enemy of Your Highness, and, therefore, the partisan of the doctor and Olga?"

"Go on."

"You mentioned that Jones is anxious to obtain evidence for the purpose of his report to the Government of India?"

"Yes, yes."

"Couldn't we arrange that the messenger who spins the yarn about the injured man is accepted by the doctor as a witness against us?"

The Maharaja thought for a few moments. Then he exclaimed with a triumphant smile, "The very thing, I have it. Farid and Rashid."

"The Persian boys. How can they help?"

"Listen, they're extremely intelligent and loyal, and I think there's no flaw. Farid'll go to the major to-night. He'll say that after Jones left me this afternoon, I found both him and Rashid in my dressing-room, where they were waiting for my Persian lesson. They told me that

they'd seen you, disguised as the doctor, take Jones's instruments from my bedroom. Realizing that they might be very important witnesses against you and me, should the Maharani's death be attributed to murder and an inquiry be started, I locked them up in the suite next to mine. They managed to escape through a window, and directly I discovered this I sent men in pursuit with instructions to fire, if necessary. Farid'll describe how he has left his brother wounded among some bushes near the road, and'll beg the doctor for a conveyance and assistance."

Durrant stared at the ruler in admiration. "Splendid!" he exclaimed, "and marvellous for its simplicity. If you keep Hamid, the major's chauffeur here, Jones'll have to drive himself. Because of his bad sight, that'll make the accident still more certain. Besides, should there be any hitch, I've my service revolver." He patted his hip-pocket significantly.

"It's late," quoth the Raja. "We must school the lads, and then you three can set out together for the *Samp*. Rashid'll help you move the stones, while Farid goes on to the doctor."

Farid was coached by the Raja and Durrant and, by half-past ten, the intelligent boy was quite *au fait* in his part, which he repeated to Durrant on the way to the *Samp*.

By this time, Rayner's motor-car had been loaded with Marie's luggage. Everything was in readiness for departure to Kotibagh and Rayner was to drive.

At the last moment, Jones drew Rayner aside. "Tom," said the Major, "I'm afraid you'll think me an awful coward, but really I'm scared to be left alone here to-night, even for a few hours. I hate to ask, but do you think your wife would mind if your driver took her to the station, and you stayed here with me?"

"I'll ask her," said Rayner.

Marie, of course, agreed. She thought that with

herself and Olga at a safe distance, and the two Englishmen with whom to deal, the Raja and Durrant would be powerless. So Tom bade Marie and Olga farewell at his compound gate, and watched the motor-car as it purred its way to the city.

"You can't think how grateful I am," said Jones, "I feel an awful coward to-night."

"The murder of the Rani has upset you. I'll sleep at your place to-night," said Tom.

"Thanks so much," replied the doctor.

"I'm a bit fagged," sighed Rayner, a little later, when tubbed, and clad in pyjamas, he seated himself on his bed, which had been placed in Major Jones's garden, near the doctor's. "I've told Marie to book passages for herself and Olga, and leave this blasted country by the first boat and, Jones, old man——"

"Yes Tom."

"I want you to say nothing to anyone, to anyone, mind you, about Olga. She's a bit of my wife's past that I don't want to think about out here. She's a new problem that I'll have to solve in Europe. In India, Olga would take a hell of a lot of explaining, especially her experiences in Ghanapur, and I simply couldn't face the music."

"I quite understand your feelings," returned the other. "But no doubt you realize that I must mention the name of Olga Petermann in my report to the Government of India."

"I suppose you must," said Rayner. "Perhaps though you could enclose a private note explaining Olga's position, so that her evidence, if, or when, it's required, could be taken in London."

"I'm no lawyer," replied the other, "but I imagine things might be fixed that way, and I'll suggest something of the kind if you like."

"I wish you would. By Jove, I'm sleepy!" muttered Rayner, yawning.

"It's only a quarter-to-eleven."

"Maybe. But I've been on the go since sunrise."

"Lie down then. The moon's small and won't worry you. I'll read for an hour or so, and wake you if anything happens."

Rayner dropped asleep, and while his opening explosive snores assailed the doctor's ears, Durrant and the two Persian lads reached the scene of their activities.

The point selected by Durrant for staging the motor accident was on the *Samp*, the most tortuous part of the new road leading from the city to the palace. The extremely dangerous spot Durrant had in mind was a sharp curve between two long, rocky spurs, through which the road passed. The ravine between the spurs was crossed by an earth bank, the edges of which were defined by the small whitewashed boulders observed by Olga on her drive from Kotibagh to the palace. Durrant's simple plan was to move the stones on the driver's left-hand side so that they led to the right-hand side of the road, where there was a precipice with an almost sheer drop of two hundred and fifty feet. The stones on the right side were removed altogether and hidden from view. Night and the waning moon favoured the enterprise, because the road was entirely in the shadow of the hill side, and the driver's vision was restricted by the cutting ahead.

Before dispatching Farid, Durrant deliberately cut a finger, and smeared the boy's clothes with blood. Farid then hurried away to the doctor's bungalow, leaving Durrant and Rashid to their diabolical labour, and by the time Farid reached the doctor the task had been completed.

Major Jones had not retired when Farid appeared, breathless, perspiring and blood stained. The doctor recognized the lad and wakened Rayner.

"Wash matt?" asked Tom, sleepily.

"Wake up, wake up, man!" replied Jones shaking Rayner vigorously.

Thus compelled to relinquish the luxury of slumber, Rayner seated himself on the edge of his bed and listened to Farid's story. With tears the lad implored the *sabibs* to rescue his wounded brother, and answered without hesitation the questions with which he was plied.

"We ought to start at once," said Rayner, now thoroughly awake. "The wounded lad may bleed to death."

"But who's to drive?" asked Jones. "I daren't at night, especially over the palace road. Hamid, my driver, isn't here, and your car, which took your wife and Olga to catch the Bombay mail, hasn't yet returned from Kotibagh."

"I suppose I'll have to drive," said Tom. "I don't know your car, but I do know the road. Damn it, I built it."

"Thank you," said Jones.

"I'll go dead slow up the hill," Rayner added "and we must hope for the best. Farid and I'll bring the car round while you get bandages and things."

Shortly before midnight they set off, Rayner at the wheel, Jones by his side, while Farid occupied a seat in the back of the open touring car.

"I left Rashid in some bushes at the palace end of the *Samp*," said Farid.

"I'll go easy," said Rayner as they entered the *Samp*, "and keep just inside the white stones on the left. You, Jones, and Farid, keep a sharp look-out on the right side."

They slowly and safely negotiated the first, second, and third curves.

"This is the nasty bit," said Rayner. Suddenly he jammed on the brakes and brought the car to a standstill. "Get out Jones," Tom commanded, "and have a look. I could swear the line of the road has altered. I'll follow as soon as I've backed the car into safety."

As Jones scrambled out of the car, and advanced

towards the white stones leading to the precipice, Durrant sprang upon him from behind, intending to hurl him into the abyss.

The headlights of the car had enabled Rayner to recognize the private secretary, and Tom was upon Durrant in a flash.

Durrant, startled, released his hold of the doctor, but Jones was dazed by the attack of which he had been the victim, and some seconds elapsed before he realized what was happening. There was a thud. Rayner had fallen with Durrant on top of him. Jones, startled into activity, rushed to assist his friend, but it was too late. Durrant, rising to his feet, whipped out his revolver, and deliberately shot Rayner through the head. Then, turning round to deal with the doctor in the same manner, Durrant lost his balance, and fell backwards over the edge of the precipice.

Horried, Jones knelt by Tom's side and ascertained that Rayner was dead.

By this time Farid and Rashid had disappeared.

For a time, Jones debated what to do next. Obviously nothing could be done for poor Tom. The doctor realized that his own life was in danger, for he felt sure that the Raja would stop at nothing to prevent him from leaving the State alive. The emergency admitted no delay. Much against his will, Jones decided to abandon Tom's body, return on foot to the guest house, and proceed to British India in Rayner's car, which should have returned from Kotibagh by the time the doctor reached his bungalow.

When they saw Durrant overbalance, and the doctor kneeling beside Rayner's prostrate body, Farid and Rashid hastened to the palace. The Maharaja was alone in his study, and managed to extract from the terror-stricken lads an account of the dreadful happenings of the night. As soon as he had convinced his suspicious brain that the boys' story was true, the Prince bade Farid and

Rashid return immediately to the *Samp* and restore the white stones to their original positions.

"And Maharaja *Sahib*, what about Durrant *Sahib's* and Rayner *Sahib's* bodies?" the boys asked in frightened tones.

"The corpses can wait until the morning. As soon as the stones are replaced you can both go direct to bed. I shan't need either of you again to-night."

When the brothers had taken their departure, the ruler dispatched spies to the guest houses with instructions to bring him news about Jones, whose escape, if necessary, they should prevent by force. At dawn the spies returned to say the bird had flown.

The Maharaja then realized that with Olga and Jones alive, and at liberty to bear witness against him, his last stake had been raked in by Death, the croupier.

From a secret drawer the Prince drew a package, and extracted a small crystal which he held for some seconds between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

"Kismet!" he uttered as he placed the crystal between his lips.

When Ram Lal entered the room an hour later, His Highness the Maharaja of Ghanapur was dead.

CHAPTER XXII

PETROVKA ! PETROVKA !

FROM behind the curtains of the stage box Marie noted that the Grafburg Opera House was filled to overflowing. She gazed upon the packed house, and visualized herself, a child in a white frock, in that same building, listening to her father's music, and dreaming of the day when she would sing his compositions on that historic stage, supported by that famous body of musicians, the Grafburg Symphony Orchestra. Although this ambition had never been realized, part of herself was about to face the ordeal for which she had yearned, because Olga was to be the soloist of the evening. Marie felt that all her artistic cravings were about to be satisfied by her daughter.

Two years had elapsed since Marie and Olga had left Bombay, and during that period, music had been their spiritual mainstay, the healing balm that had soothed the wounds of mind and spirit. Once again Olga was dedicated to the piano. She had completed her training in Grafburg under Petroff's pupil, Leo Mann, and in less than eighteen months after resuming her career Olga had established Petrovka's position in the musical world. By a series of pianoforte recitals in Germany, Austria and Holland, Petrovka had earned a special niche in the gallery of virtuosi. It was for her to acquire the cachet of the supreme artiste that Leo Mann had arranged Petrovka's appearance at the Grafburg Opera House.

Marie had found the atmosphere of the artistes' room too charged with electricity for the maintenance of her composure. She was infinitely more nervous about Olga's performance than she had ever been about her

own appearances, even on a Vronsky first night. Marie had never completely recovered from the shock of Rayner's death, and grieved bitterly that his marriage with the woman for whom he had waited for the best part of his life had been so pathetically brief and joyless.

A few minutes before the concert was due to commence Leo Mann entered the box. At last the preliminary excitement was at an end. The doors had been closed. The stalwart custodians had refused admission to late comers, until the end of the first item on the programme. The lights in the auditorium had been extinguished. The lights on the stage had been raised. Breithaupt, the conductor, then appeared, leading Olga by the hand. She wore a soft mauve frock that threw into relief the fairness of her hair. She and Breithaupt bowed acknowledgment of the applause that greeted them. The conductor took up his baton and rapped on the side of his desk, commanding the supreme attention of the seventy-five musicians who formed the orchestra. He began to beat time, and Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* had commenced.

Marie's heart thumped so hard that she feared Mann would hear it, but her apprehensions were needless. He was leaning forward, his long artistic fingers gripping the rail in front of him, a look of rapture on his expressive face, as though he were listening to celestial strains.

Youth was on Olga's side, and she no longer felt any ill effects from the hardships she had endured in Ghanapur. Her playing was characterized by a breadth of outlook and a remarkable virility, which evoked thunderous applause at the conclusion of the *concerto*. Again and again the soloist was recalled, and each time retired to shouts of "*Petrovka! Petrovka! Noch einmal!*"¹ *Bis!*"² *Herrlich!*"³

During the ovation, Marie and Mann slipped into the

¹ Once again.

² Encore.

³ Magnificent.

artistes' room, and the latter decreed that Petrovka must take no more calls.

"As you know the time limit of these concerts is so strictly observed that we daren't prolong the interval," Mann said. "You must rest before the Liszt *Concerto* which makes many demands upon the soloist."

"All right !" said Olga "but I'm not a bit tired."

Marie realized that, at that moment, the girl was experiencing the greatest happiness of her life. Among the crowd in the artistes' room, Petrovka alone was perfectly calm, undisturbed alike by her triumphs and by the work that lay ahead of her. Olga felt that she had been born for scenes such as this. She was far less excited about her triumph as a musician, than she had been about her popularity on the *Shah Jahan*. That popularity had been unexpected. This artistic victory was merely the materialization of hopes that had been Petrovka's companions since babyhood. Petrovka was the real Olga, the artiste dedicated solely to her instrument, and for whom everything but music had become of minor import.

The scenes of wild enthusiasm were repeated at the close of Liszt's E flat *Concerto*, and Mann, with shirt front inflated with pride, declared to Marie that one of the greatest privileges of his life was to have been associated with the moulding of Petrovka.

A group of short pieces brought the programme to a close. The solos included two by Paul Drayton, and an impromptu by Petrovka herself. To mother and daughter, Petrovka's composition possessed a hidden meaning. The main theme was Olga's answer to Petroff's appeal to destiny, which had been uppermost in Olga's thoughts when she parted from her mother before the War. To both Marie and Olga, the impromptu was a thank-offering to the Universal God for their reunion. Marie was not surprised when Leo Mann declared it would live by reason of its tempestuous beauty.

Again the cries of "*Bis ! Petrovka bis !*" filled the

theatre, as Olga rose from the piano at the termination of this, her last item.

"You must give an encore," both Mann and Breithaupt declared.

"But what about the time limit?" said Olga, glancing at the clock in the artistes' room.

"Geniuses may break rules," replied Breithaupt, perspiring with fervour, as he kissed Olga's hand.

"*Liszt lebt ja wieder!*"¹ In the wings Marie caught the cry at the close of Olga's encore, Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody*, which had caused the excited audience to lose the last vestige of restraint. The listeners crowded to the front of the stalls, gazing enraptured at the girl musician. Many handed Petrovka autograph books, while one and all clamoured for further encores. It was not until Mann appeared, and begged that Petrovka might be allowed to retire to a well earned rest, that the clapping in the theatre subsided.

As Olga and Marie drove from the Opera House, the girl remarked, "To me the most wonderful thing of all was that cry of '*Liszt lebt ja wieder.*'" The pianist lowered her voice and drew nearer to her mother. "As I was playing I had a vision of Liszt near the piano," she added. "I've often felt his presence before, but this was the first time that I actually saw him. With Liszt to guard my music, we need have no fears for the future, mother, you and I."

Marie pressed her daughter's hand in silent comprehension.

"*Petrovka! Petrovka!*" The cries reached the ears of mother and daughter again. Students, with glasses in their hands, compelled the pianist's car to slow down, as they drank Petrovka's health. Those lads who were sufficiently agile, swarmed on to the running boards, the others walked beside the car and escorted Petrovka in triumph to her home.

¹Liszt lives, again.

